OUT OF LINE
Performing Drag and Archive in Settler Culture

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PhD Thesis in Drama and Theatre Studies

Royal Holloway
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Declaration of Authorship

I, Raz Weiner hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: ______________________ Date: 07.06.2019
ABSTRACT

This thesis articulates a new approach for to the study of culture and within this, performance, in the specific context of the settler-colonial site of Israel-Palestine, from the point of view of the settler subject. While the relevance of queer theory to indigenous subjects and communities in settler-colonial reality has been studied extensively, scholarship has given scant attention to its potential for rethinking the decolonisation of settlers.

Working through the phenomenological framework of the queer feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2006), the thesis revisits drag – both as a practice of queer performance and as a phenomenological construct – to address a mode of resisting alignment; a disorientation device and a destabiliser of singular significations. Methodologically, this study integrates historical and archival research with an autoethnographic study of practices of drag and theatre-making, in testing the potential of the ‘queer’ and the ‘oblique’ to instruct decolonising interventions and transformation of settler subjects by means of performance.

In this, the site of the kibbutz, its history, scholarship, and contemporary reality are studied genealogically as prototypes of settler subjectivisation. The first part of the thesis, ‘Settler Colonialism and Performance,’ contextualises and reconstructs practices of racial and ethnic mimicry (‘Ethnic Drag’; Sieg 2009) as integral to settler culture and ideology. The second part of the thesis, ‘Drag and the Settler Archive’, theorises the settler archive as both produced by and contradictory to the logic of the settlement project and, therefore, providing unique opportunities for decolonising interventions. The latter is explored through a comparative study of archive-based projects. The theoretical-phenomenological analysis of the various case studies is experimented with as dramaturgy in the reflection on two works of performance, a solo drag performance, and an immersive musical show, marking trajectories for decolonising performance practice in Israel-Palestine and their limitations.
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INTRODUCTION

This work studies the meanings of drag in the political reality of Israel-Palestine, a reality shaped by the structure of settler-colonialism (Wolfe 1999, 2012; Shafir 1996 Veracini 2010, 2015; Lentin 2018). I argue that within this particular space, the performance of drag acquires distinct symbolic meanings which participate in, perpetuate, and facilitate the disavowal of colonial violence and the gradual elimination of indigenous-Palestinian identities and publics.¹ Simultaneously, the consideration of drag in and through this context calls for a new understanding of the concept in terms other than these of crossing or masquerading, but rather as operating on and interferes with multiple norms (‘lines’) of perception.

A conceptualisation of drag that is grounded in a phenomenological approach not only allows us to theorise the privileged position of symbolic-corporealised acts of ‘cross-dressing’ and ‘costuming’ for decolonisation, but also enables the extension of these practices from human bodies to bodies of landscape and architecture. As this study will show, drag is used both in the perpetuation of and the resistance to settler-colonial trajectories in Israel-Palestine and is essential for their understanding, both theoretically and as a distinct range of practices. Throughout this thesis, a non-binary position is upheld, rejecting complicit acceptance of discursive dichotomies not only of gender and sexuality but of nation and national-conflict as well. Instead, I seek to retrace subtle dynamics of subject-formation that occur within and as a result of long-term processes of colonisation and the resistance to them.

In the first section of my introduction I position my research in relation to the paradigms of settler colonialism and queer phenomenology (Ahmed 2006). By combining several analytical frameworks and theoretical tools, I articulate my approach to the study of ‘settler-culture.’ In the second section, I move to the re-conceptualisation of drag as signifying the ‘suspension of straightening devices’ (ibid: 171), and as intimately related to the tropes of reenactment and archive in performance studies and queer theory. The last part of the introduction, McTildalogy,

¹ ‘Space’ here stands for the widest possible geopolitical context; the site or locale of Israel-Palestine as a given, while other related designations such as territory(s), occupied territory, state, land, conflict zone, autonomy, and others are examined as different relational modes by which this space (reality) ‘comes into view’ (Ahmed 2006).

Following the social-queer theorist Michael Warner, I use ‘public(s)’ to refer to a group of people that share and relate to a specific discourse, distinguished from ‘audience’ which I use to address specific theatre- or performance-goer(s) (Warner 2002: 413).
is named after my drag persona Tilda Death and will outline the methodological strategies I deployed in this research - archival-historical research, ethnography, autoethnography, and Performing as Research – as well as the rationale behind using them all in tandem.
At the centre of this photograph, taken in May 2018 at the Israel-Gaza border, are four young Palestinian men dressed as the Navi characters from the science-fiction film *Avatar* (Cameron 2009). This popular Hollywood fantasy epic depicts the successful resistance of the indigenous Navi civilisation of the planet Pandora to invading armies of human mining-companies. The frequent resurfacing of this visual reference in Palestinian demonstrations against Israeli oppression a decade after the film was released attests to its enduring symbolic resonance. While the global identificatory appeal of Avatar for indigenous groups has been noted in scholarship (Loshitzky 2012; Adamson 2012; Simpson 2011), little to no attention has been given to the symbolic economies of a Navi costume in the context of resistance to the colonial aspect of ontological erasure. Founding scholars of settler-colonial theory place the elimination of indigenous communities by means of disavowal and/or transfer as one of its seminal features - a social-cultural and institutional mechanism endemic to colonial societies. The anthropologist Patrick Wolfe positions the difference in interests regarding land and labour as the prime

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2 See also Loshinsky 2012 on the performances of Navi by Palestinian protesters.
distinction between colonialism and settler colonialism. While colonialism is ultimately invested in exploiting the resources of the colony, the labour of indigenous populations included, and in channeling their capital back to the metropolis, settler colonialism is rather invested in the land itself, in the territory. It is the distinctive objective of settler colonialism to establish a new settler-society in place of the indigenous one (Wolfe, 2016: 3; Veracini 2011:3). Therefore, while colonialism is interested in the preservation and domination of the indigenous population (as the labour force), settler colonialism strives for its gradual elimination (Veracini ibid). The historian Lorenzo Veracini follows Wolfe in demonstrating the centrality of mechanisms of elimination of the indigenous to the body-politic and cultures of different settler societies, primarily through the disavowal of indigenous existence or transfer (Veracini 2008, 2010).

The Palestinian-Israeli example repeatedly demonstrates how the symbolic erasure of the indigenous turns necropolitical with the destruction of Palestinian lives. The event in the photograph took place during the weeks of protests leading to the relocation of the US embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem in the spring of 2018. More than sixty Palestinian demonstrators were shot dead during the embassy-related demonstrations, in what became the largest colonial massacre since the Soweto Uprising in 1976 South Africa (Holpuch and Weaver 2018). The violence of the symbolic act of the Trump administration lay in its disavowal of the Palestinian existence, and the complete oversight of the historical and political identity of Palestinian Jerusalem. In this context, adorning blue body-paint and wigs on bodies that are positioned between the Palestinian flag and the barbed-wire fence exemplifies a gesture of visualising oneself rather than disguising. Settler-colonial reality deems both the discourse of the nation-state and its implied legitimacy for self-determination (the flag) and the testimonies of the direct corporeal violence of oppression and dispossession (the fence) in themselves inadequate for the protest to be visible in its full political meaning. An additional and acutely external element is consciously recruited here by the protesters and it is strategically artificial. They succeed in standing out and being heard and seen (enough at least to earn the attention of a journalism photographer) when they utilise a fictionalised representation of indigeneity, devoid of pre-

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3 As was typically the case with British colonialism in India and West Africa for example.

4 The idea of Necropolitics is suggested by the political philosopher Achille Mbembe, as he shifts Foucault’s ‘biopower’ towards realities of colonial war and conflict, indicating that ‘after all, [war] is as much a means of achieving sovereignty as a way of exercising the right to kill’ (Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’ 2003: 12)
existing historical contexts and, therefore, less susceptible to denial or disavowal. The performance of indigeneity as a political existence and ontological viability is required in order for the flag and fence to be read, to speak the language of indigenous resistance to colonialism and to expose the structure of settler-colonial violence. For, if according to settler ideology, the indigenous does not exist - how can any violence be directed towards them? What rights, political or human, can she be entitled to if she is simply ‘not’? Symbols of Palestinian folklore such as the Hata-scarfs that are tied around the protesters’ waists are as ineffective when featured on their own, perhaps due to their use as national symbols. Unlike the Hats, the Navi costumes bypass national discourses which circulate and sustain the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, featuring ‘naked’ indigeneity.

The implications of Wolfe’s famous proclamation of Settler-Colonialism as a process rather than an event reach far beyond a reconfiguration of colonised-coloniser relations as fixated in an ongoing struggle for land (Wolfe 2006: 402). They enable a critical understanding of the very ontology of the indigenous and, dialectically, that of the settler. In the political-material terms of settler-colonialism, the indigenous is not necessarily defined by a pre-contact entitlement to the land, but by the very disposition that is the settlement process. In the settler-colonial power structure, indigeneity names the collective predicament of those subjects which the settling body does not recruit and utilise to its ends but, instead, works to dispose of. This proposition implies that what we can safely generalise about the category of the indigenous is that it is ontologically - politically and culturally - reproduced by a constant day-to-day struggle to survive the violence of settler ambition. As a result, indigenous people are racialised, impoverished, and their bodies, lives, and belongings - material as well as intellectual and cultural - are in constant jeopardy. This by no means suggests that Palestinians, Maoris, or First Nations in Canada and the USA are not much more or other than ‘indigenous,’ nor that these collective designations do not often mark sacred cultural legacies, languages, cosmologies, typologies, shared physical features or a long-lasting relationship with, and entitlement to lands - they do. However, as far as the structural analysis of settler-colonial power relations is concerned, none of these can or should qualify to form the legitimacy for indigenous struggles,

Traditionally, even when sympathetic to indigenous political struggles, literature of indigenous theatre and performance perpetrates and maintains a romanticising imaginary of indigenous groups as endowed with proto-mystical aura, natural justice, and innocence, thus recirculating age-old derogatory Euro-centric, and racist, ontologies (see for reference Gilbert and Gleghorn 2014) In turn, this leads to the understanding and theorisation of violent tropes such as exotification and appropriation as ‘ethically flawed’ rather than ontologically and corporeally dangerous; necropolitical (Mbembe 2003).
nor introduce any set of expectations regarding whether she is indigenous, and how should she look, speak, behave, where her grandfather was born, or what religion she practices.

This understanding of the long-term underlying dynamics of power deems any analytical framework which is embedded within discourse of nationalism or nation-state futile in theorising, unpacking, and challenging settler colonial realities and, within them, cultures.\(^6\) Therefore, the theorisation of the reality of Israel-Palestine as a conflict that is forged between two national groups obfuscates the gradual structural elimination of the Palestinians by means of settlement and, in doing so, risks participating in and enhancing it. While many areas of the social sciences have recognised this and have consequently developed new tools and languages to address the challenges of researching and theorising Israel-Palestine, theatre and performance studies so far persist in their reliance on national frameworks. Attempts to understand the political workings of performance in this locale as well as to evaluate what falls under the category of ‘political theatre/performance’ that does not unfold from the recognition of settler-colonial structures are inconsistent with political reality, at best. By placing cultural-political mechanisms of elimination of Palestinian indigeneity in the centre of my analysis of performances in Israel, I attempt to fill this gap.

Returning to the image of the Palestinian demonstration, such a theoretical shift from the national conflict to the settler-colonial instructs us to comprehend the means by which Navi-costume activates theatricality of a certain kind. In retracing the etymological and discursive sources of ‘theatricality’, the theatre historian Tracy C. Davis argues that it was coined by the philosopher and historian Thomas Carlyle and deployed by him as a neologism distinguished from the ‘theatrical’ (Davis and Postlewait 2003). While for different scholars in different periods (most obviously towards the end of the twentieth century) the ‘theatrical’ stands for ‘conscious mimeticism, audience presence, and behavioural resemblance to stage genres or styles,’ theatricality is to be understood as an attribute, or action, of the spectator rather than a characteristic of the spectated (128). Significantly, writing in the context of the French Revolution, where ‘nation and theatre, or state as theatre were crucially in operation’ (37), theatricality for Carlyle indicates a moment in the public sphere where a spectator denies

\(^6\) An early example of a significant work to make the case for settler-colonialism as a viable and productive frame of analytical study of Israel Palestine was published by the historian Gershon Shafir, examining early Zionist policies of labour and land acquisition in pre-First World War Palestine (Shafir [1989] 1996). A recent example is the work of the political theorist Ronit Lentin, which builds on Patrick Wolfe and on Gorgio Agamben’s ‘exceptionalism’ in arguing for the relevance of settler colonial structures to the construction of race in Israel Palestine (Lentin 2018).
sympathy and thus becomes aware of the act of witnessing itself. Building on this, Davis contends:

In public life [...] the onus for instigating [the] theatrical moment is on the spectator, who by failing to sympathise and instead commencing to think, becomes an actor. Through being spectators to the theatrum mundi of civil society, engaged but not absorbed watchers, we bring our whole experience to bear on what is seen without insisting on sameness as the criterion of worth [...] it is the act of withholding sympathy that makes us become spectators to ourselves and others [...] it is not solely in intersubjectivity that civil society is maintained, but in what separates us (154).

Notwithstanding the incongruity of applying notions of ‘public sphere’ to colonial realities predicated on separation and exclusion, this thesis embraces Davis’s theorisation of theatricality as a spectatorial choice (‘moral act’; 36). That is, as a conscious analytical approach to actions (performances) within a political and social context and distinguished from ‘theatrical’ as pertaining to or resembling of the theatre, or as a marker of relation to representation or mimesis. Theatricality is therefore the framework within which I am considering the meanings of different performances to the dynamics of elimination in settler-colonial reality and resistance to it.

I take the Navi-image from the demonstration in Gaza to be the starting point of my thesis – which in the philosophical tradition of phenomenology might be termed a ‘zero-point’ - the place from which this research unfolds and to which its multiple and simultaneous trajectories will attempt to return (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2012; Ahmed 2006). Morbidly theatrical in its own right, the image does not feature the people, culture nor performances to which my work typically attends. Instead, it depicts both the backdrop and consequences of Zionist settler-culture and not its manifestations. However, the image and the act recorded in it, along with the historical time in which it takes place, powerfully expresses the conjunction of the key themes with which this investigation is preoccupied. Its proximity to one of the epicentres of current anticolonial struggle in Palestine (the fence that encloses Gaza) attests to the contemporary political and cultural relevance of this project. By investigating these themes in the following sections, I will chart the major theoretical and conceptual frameworks upon which this research is imbricated and will mark the discursive fields through which I intend to articulate its pivotal questions.
Studying the Settler

When the strategy of colonisation is understood in terms of the elimination of the indigenous, the anti-colonial impulse directs us towards decolonising tactics which would work to recover and enhance indigenous presence, agency and struggle. In this light, the choice to focus this research on the Israeli settler rather than the indigenous Palestinian is not only not obvious but also involves certain challenges which I would like to point out from the beginning.

The first and most intuitive incentive to research settler culture is tied to my own biography, family history and positionality. I was born in an Israeli kibbutz, two years before the outbreak of the first Intifada. As the first chapter of this work demonstrates, the kibbutz method of Zionist settlement excelled in establishing an isolationist, elitist, settler-utopia, settling on Palestinian lands whilst engineering cultures that deny Palestinian existence and agency. My grandparents belong to the generation that was the first to be born and raised in kibbutzim (plural form of kibbutz) and their role in shaping my most fundamental relationships with landscape, ideology, and ethics cannot be overemphasised. The first Intifada - the popular Palestinian uprising that started in 1987 and lasted well into the early 1990s - accompanied the first years of my childhood, forming what the queer philosopher Sara Ahmed terms (after Husserl) ‘background’, the conditions of reality that are out of phenomenological focus and therefore invisible (Ahmed 2006: 24; 55–56). Within Israeli public discourse, both in politics and culture, the first Intifada marks the ‘return of the Arab’, a point where the hegemonic denial of Palestinian existence was significantly fractured due to popular demonstrations against the Israeli regime of military oppression in the West-Bank, eventually leading to the Oslo peace accords. The discrepancy between the affectionate identification of my grandparents with the kibbutz and Zionism and the highly critical stand some of them took against the occupation of the West Bank and sympathy with the Palestinian struggle for liberation (albeit generalised and often abstract in their articulation of it) is to a large extent my first encounter with settler disavowal. To say the least, this discrepancy was confusing and is often still so. My research attends to this confusion and its manifestations in deep symbolic and discursive layers of the performance of identity and ideology. The decolonial position I offer is one that must come in sync with Palestinian struggle and, with the aim of complementing and enhancing it. It precludes a subsequent or implied investigation as to the decolonising potential of settler subjects in Israel-Palestine (i.e. Jewish
Israelis), critically examining privilege, hegemonic blindness, and entrenched assumptions of symmetry, equality, and justice.

The premise that the indigenous is defined ontologically by their resistance to structures of elimination and erasure constitutes - by means of opposition - the settler as that whom identity is conditioned by, and formulated through, the culture of annihilation (‘making dis-appear’) of an-other. The political historian Mahmood Mamdani who raised the question ‘when does the settler become a native?’ noted that settlers are made by ‘conquest, not just immigration’ (Mamdani 1998). While decolonisation is for the indigenous a movement towards recovery of agency, recognition, and reparation, for the settler decolonisation would involve ‘un-being’.

Alongside the institution of equal citizenship and the abandonment of supremacist privileges (Mamdani 1998; Zreik 2016), the decolonised settler requires new configurations of identity and belonging. I am inspired here by the indigenous scholar Nick Estes who, in a talk at Brown University in 2017, used the term ‘settler ontocide’ when commenting on the role of white allies in struggles against land-grab in the US. I take this term to be a guiding principle in my investigation of moments in which performance facilitates learning or unlearning of ‘settleness.’ I build on a long tradition in postcolonial thought, beginning with writings of Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon on the one hand, and my own experience as an Ashkenazy (white) Israeli man on the other, when assuming the compromise and damage caused to the very humanity of the settler in a reality of colonial violence (Memmi 2003; Fanon 2008). The articulation of sites of settler ontocide through the study of performance is therefore a gesture towards re-humanisation as much as it is towards decolonisation.

The political and legal theorist Raif Zreik calls for the theorisation of the settler specifically within the Zionist context (Zreik 2016). Approaching this question from the perspective of the Palestinian responsibility to ‘state its terms’ for decolonisation, he concludes that theorising the settler is a necessity not a privilege in the case of Israel/Palestine’ (356). However, the positionality of his argument as a Palestinian scholar is crucial. As is the case with scholarly focus on whiteness, such as that of the work of the culture scholar Richard Dyer (1997), there is a concern with the reinvestment in those who have traditionally been the privileged subjects of research attention.\(^7\) A similar concern exists when men or masculinity are studied and

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\(^7\) For the various criticisms of ‘whiteness studies’ and ‘critical whiteness’ see Chen 2017.
theorised within feminist frameworks. The study of settlers is in just as much danger of using theoretical tools that evolved as decentring alternatives to hegemonic scholarship (feminism, postcolonialism, critical race theory, queer theory etc.) to legitimise the experiences and histories of marginalised subjects for the study of hegemonic ones. By doing so we are risking redirecting resources yet again to the privileged, undermining the hard-won achievements of these radical traditions by silencing the silenced through them. In her essay ‘On Looking at Man,’ the feminist scholar Ava Baron offers that ‘if we only investigate women, “man” remains the universal subject against which women are defined’ (Baron 1994 in Veracini 2010: 15). To further this analogy, the field of Indigenous Studies has seen critics warning against the risks involved in isolated study of indigenous-knowledge and subjects (Andersen 2009). Veracini settles this dilemma by contending that focused research on settlers is crucial in order ‘to avoid the possibility that, despite attempts to decolonise our gaze, we continue understanding the settler as normative,’ forgetting that ‘settler colonialism is not normal or natural [but is rather] made so in a settler colonial context’ (ibid). While mostly accepting Veracini’s position, and precisely as a result of patiently attending to his theory of settler culture and discourse, I am acutely aware of the inherent biases of the very means available to me to make sense of my reality as a settler subject. Therefore, the validity of each of the methods I use and the relevance of each of the conclusions I arrive at with the objectives of decolonisation and settler-ontocide should and will be reviewed continually throughout this work. The incorporation of Palestinian as well as other indigenous scholars in my work is one of my means to achieve that, sharing my research dilemmas and findings with Palestinian colleagues is another.

This thesis is aligned and allied with a growing turn of Palestinian scholars of the humanities and social sciences in Israel to the settler-colonial paradigm and proposing its deployment in the study of theatre and performance. In an article published towards the end of this project,

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8 The indigenous studies scholar Chris Andersen warns in this regard that the ‘separation of Indigenous from white society unnecessarily marginalises two elements […]: 1) the extent of Indigenous communities’ knowledges about whiteness (a social fact which requires an expertise in ‘Western’ concepts); and 2) the extent to which the production of academic knowledge through Indigenous studies is shaped by the ‘whitestream’ academic relations of power, marking it in tension with other forms of knowledge (such as community knowledge) (Andersen 2009:81).

9 It is vital to note that settler’s culture of disavowal does not remain exclusive to the settlers as subjects but becomes the normative way that political reality is perceived, both from within and without the site of colonisation. A case in point here is the long-lasting insistence of Palestinian politics of struggle on resisting ‘tabie’ (normalisation), which instruct the avoidance of collaboration with Israeli officials and, at times, any organised collaboration with Israelis at all. Deriving from the Arabic ‘tabiea’ (nature), the very terminology instructs the importance of rejecting settler-structure as natural as well as neutral, rather than the rejection of stability or communication in general as its English translation might connote.
sociologist Areej Sabbagh-Khoury marks a return to the paradigm of settler colonialism in sociological and anthropological research in Israel (Sabbagh-Khoury 2018). She argues that unlike previous critical projects within Israeli academia which relied on a Jewish-oriented postcolonial (or other) criticism of 1948 or the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, a new wave of primarily Palestinian scholars are now articulating a comprehensive settler-colonial formwork. Sabbagh-Khoury relates the unique position of Israeli-citizen Palestinian scholars as situated ‘outside the settler society but also within it’ to their capacity to ‘promote an indigenous perspective in the historical and social research in the humanities, social sciences, and law, which challenges the roots of the settler colonial projects’ (441). While one of the major contributions of this recent scholarship is in refocusing the attention of research on Palestinians as the studied-group and calling for the necessity of complementing the tools of settler-colonialism with those of indigenous studies (412), my project seeks to complement this move with the study of settlers and settler-culture. The category of the settler as it emerges from the settler-colonial paradigm allows Jews to recognise themselves within the process of settlement and can perhaps advance what Sabbagh-Khoury describe as ‘conditions by which settlers can move away from their position, to give-up their colonial status and privilege and begin an equal dialogue’ (411).

This work also adopts the methodological trajectory propagated by Sabbagh-Khoury by focusing on phenomenology, concurring that ‘phenomenological study of the encounter between the two [Jewish and Palestinian] societies reveals the multiplicity of contradictions in their relationships and sketches out theoretical possibilities for decolonisation’ (409). Sabbagh-Khoury contends that

The development of a settler colonial paradigm is important not only for the sake of an adequate depiction of the political reality but also in order to generate thinking about possibilities which are not trapped in present political and academic hegemony. Since settler colonialism entraps both settlers and indigenous (including the researchers amongst them) within hierarchical relationships, […] [phenomenal studies of settler colonialism] present possibilities for their disintegration and

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highlight possibilities for alternative shared existence from the perspective of the indigenous victims of settler colonialism (409).

Although making significant use of archives both as resource and as object of study and historiographical research in many of its chapters, this project is essentially future-oriented. It is interested in the potential of performance – both as practice and as theory – to resist and dismantle colonial structures which destroy the lives and bodies of primarily Palestinians but also of most Israelis and those of others (such as asylum-seeking refugees). Its objectives are rooted in deep identification with and love for these collectives and the many subgroups that constitute them as well as undermine their coherence. My methodological reliance on my own biography and that of my family as well as on the reflection of my own practice as a maker of performance in Israel are prime testimonies to it.

Israel-Palestine and Settler-Colonialism

The distinction between colonialism or in other places imperialism and settler-colonialism dates as far back as the beginning of anticolonial, decolonial and later postcolonial studies (Wolfe 1999). However, the literature of settler colonialism to which this project responds is confined to the work of anthropologists, historians, and political scientists of the last two decades. This young scholarly tradition is inherently comparative, perceiving settler societies as ‘peer-reviewed projects’ (2). Assuming a shared colonial ideology, institutional ancestry in European imperialism, and mutual awareness, this unifying study of multiple locales ‘focuses on settler colonial imaginaries and forms’ where ‘extraordinarily different circumstances are […] juxtaposed on the basis of morphological contiguity’ (Veracini 2010: 12). The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism, published in 2016, includes studies of times and places that are remote and different from each other, from the neo-Assyrian and Roman societies to modern Russia and Japan (Cavanagh and Veracini 2016). I follow Sabbagh-Khoury in her description of settler colonialism as a paradigm rather than a theory: ‘an interpretive framework of accumulated historical analogies’ (2018: 393).

Notwithstanding its underlying inclination to sweeping generalisations and a tendency to smooth over evidence that does not sit well with a general claim, this multi-armed approach is effective in countering the obfuscation of structural violence in realities of settler colonialism
as exceptional or fragmentary. Veracini outlines the (generalised) operations of this obfuscation, beginning with observing in settler societies:

a recurrent need to disavow[which] produces a circumstance where the actual operation of settler colonial practices is concealed behind other occurrences […]. The settler hides behind the metropolitan coloniser (the settler is not sovereign, it is argued; “he is not responsible for colonialism” and its excesses), behind the activity of settlers elsewhere, behind the persecuted, the migrant, even the refugee (the settler has suffered elsewhere and “is seeking refuge in a new land”). The settler hides behind his labour and hardship (the settler does not dispossess anyone; he “wrestles with the land to sustain his family”). Most importantly, the peaceful settler hides behind the ethnic cleanser (colonisation is an inherently non-violent activity); the settler enters a “new, empty land to start a new life”; indigenous people naturally and inevitably “vanish”; it is not settlers that displace them (Veracini 2010:13).

Settler-colonial theory attempts to uncover mechanisms that saturate national and international discourses, narratives and norms of conduct by ‘mapping the particular histories that sustain settler colonialism in any given locale, distinguishing the contingent from the systematic as well as the autochthonous from the transnational’ (Wolfe 2012: 135). Whatever may be the degree of success to which this or other scholar of settler-colonialism accomplishes this goal, my work engages critically and carefully with this scholarship, inspired by it and reviewing it simultaneously.

I am particularly invested in two main assertions put forward by the framework of settler-colonialism, corresponding with the work of two of its leading thinkers and which I have briefly mentioned before: Wolfe’s suggestion of ‘structure’ over ‘event’ and Veracini’s theorisation of disavowal and self-obfuscation of settler consciousness. Widely seen as the founding figure of settler-colonial studies, Patrick Wolfe established in his influential Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology (1999) the understanding of settler-realities as the result of ‘long-term structural consistency’ (Wolfe 2006: 402). Wolfe emphasises the primacy of an impartial capitalist drive for land-grab in the formation of settler-colonial realities. In his analytical frame, the logic of settlement as structure subjugates all other logics and discourses – national, judicial, ethical, racial, ethnic, universal – and appropriates them pragmatically and strategically. The history of the last century in Israel-Palestine is seen in this way as the development of a Zionist settlement project, of which the execution – and the resistance to it – formed the Israeli and the Palestinian national collectives respectively. It understands the
division and separation of Palestinian sub-collectives in and outside of the state of Israel – Muslim, Christian, Druze and Bedouin citizens of Israel (‘48), inhabitants of the West-Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza (‘67) and refugees around the world – as the result of different strategies or stages of elimination of the indigenous rather than the expression of ethnic or religious divides, or the arbitrary outcome of multiple violent eruptions of a national conflict. I follow Wolfe in assuming an underlying structural impulse for settlement – land-grab and elimination of the indigenous – in every aspect of Zionist cultural production. In some of the case studies of settler-performance which I will examine, I will retrace an alignment with the need to cultivate and sustain a public that will advance the cause of the settlement project, implement its tasks, inherit its spoils and pay its prices. In others, I will reconstruct and theorise different trajectories of resistance to this impulse, mostly ones that do so by forcing the disavowed into view.

As mentioned above, the attempts to extend settler-colonial theory to the study of culture and performance are scarce. One significant exception to this rule is the work of Veracini on settler ‘consciousness.’ First in an article published in 2008, and later in Settler Colonialism A Theoretical Overview (2010), Veracini ‘explores the possibility of a Lacanian (imaginary-symbolic-real) interpretation of settler colonial phenomena’ (75). Comparing shared characteristics of settler collectives from (mainly) his native Australia alongside the US, Canada, Ireland, South Africa and Israel-Palestine, Veracini recounts multiple pathologies (‘paranoiac dispositions’) that are, according to him, germane to ‘the settler’ such as disavowal, founding violence, primal-scene, split of the ego, and screen-memory (Veracini 2008, 2010:74-94). He builds on the work of the literary scholar Jaqueline Rose, who in her comparative study of Israel-Palestine and South Africa makes a case for the significance of the introduction of fantasy into the analysis of political histories of violence (Rose 2004). The psychoanalytic profile that emerges from Veracini’s analysis usefully marks several tendencies peculiar to settler societies such as their relationship with utopia or the paradoxical relationship between the denial of violence and the constant fear of revenge (Veracini 2010: 81).

However, the application of psychoanalytical terminology to such a wide range of political, cultural, ideological and historical cases deems this attempt highly limited and generalised. It falls short particularly when considered vis-à-vis contemporary Israeli culture which, albeit engaging in an advanced settlement project of high intensity, does not appear to conform to much of Veracini’s assumptions regarding, for example, non-encounters between the settlers
and the indigenous people (84). In light of the predominance of a nationalistic, openly aggressive discourse in the last two decades in Israel, and its relatively newly-adopted populistic tendencies, Veracini’s discussion of the settler’s desire for ‘pure provenance’, devoid of the taint of ‘founding violence’, appears dated and inadequate. Beyond establishing disavowal of the indigenous and obfuscation of the settler-colonial structure as constitutive to and inseparable from settler projects, his demonology of pathologies is of little help in understanding the conditions and mechanisms by which this disavowal takes place in a particular settler culture. Moreover, the psychoanalytical level that assumes an ahistorical collective ‘settler-consciousness,’ and, therefore, ‘subconsciousness’ or ‘unconscious,’ leaves unattended the fact of the bodies of settlers, their position(s) in space and their actions. To an extent, the trope of the settler remains abstracted in Veracini’s description and, therefore (yet again), invisible and disavowed as a concrete political reality. This theoretical conceptual void is significant especially when we approach performance as a range of symbolic-corporeal practices, as actions of bodies in spaces and it is in this void that this works intervenes.

**Settler Colonialism and Queer Phenomenology**

My interest in the dynamics of disavowal as it pertains to a mechanism of elimination which in turn traverses from the symbolic (ideological) to the (corpo)real in a settler-colonial structure has directed me towards phenomenology, the philosophical tradition devoted to the deconstruction and theorisation of perception. Queer Phenomenology is the name that philosopher and queer-studies scholar Sara Ahmed give to her intervention in the foundational works of the philosophers Edmond Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Ahmed 2006).\(^\text{11}\) While Husserl’s intellectual projects can be said to be dedicated to the study of what and how things come to be perceived (‘come into being’), Merleau-Ponty significantly reframed phenomenology as emanating from (the perspective of) the body. Ahmed builds on both their works to theorise how things (objects, bodies, ideas) fail to be perceived, being dis-regarded, and ‘invisiblised’. Seen in this light, her work offers a phenomenological study of disavowal.

\(^{11}\) Ahmed is aware of the repercussions of de-territorialising ‘queer’, risking undermining it a signifier of nonnormative sexualities. She contends however that ‘it is important to retain both meanings [the latter and the oblique or ‘non-straight’] which are after all historically related even when we do not reduce them’; ‘to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things’ (2006: 161).
By reviewing several of Ahmed’s key concepts, I will outline the relevance of queer phenomenology to the study of settler-culture and, particularly, of performance in settler-colonies while, simultaneously, demonstrate how these will be deployed here.

One of the questions that Ahmed places at the onset of her project is what it means to be ‘oriented,’ both as having a ‘sexual orientation’ and of being ‘oriented’ sexually, drawing attention to the directionality as well as the spatiality that are implied by this term (Ahmed 2006:1). What is regularly understood as a question of (often rigidly binary) sexual practice, identity or affiliation is reformulated here in terms of the position of a body in space, in relation to, and with, other bodies and objects. Orientation implies a certain set of relations to space as having a specific shape that extends or does not extend the body that inhabits it, enhances and reverberates it or negates and eliminates its existence. Ahmed marks a dialectic relation when noting that: ‘orientations shape what bodies do, while bodies are shaped by orientations they already have, as effects of the work that must take place for a body to arrive where it does’ (58). Work in this sense relates both to the work of social and ideological structures and the work of individuals that operate within or against them. In line with Merleau-Ponty’s consideration of the co-relation and mutuality between bodies and the spaces they inhabit, Ahmed invites us to think of social, political and sexual identities in spatial terms. ‘Bodies,’ she notes, ‘do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather shaped by their dwelling and take shape by dwelling’ (9). Understood as orientation, who we come to be in the world – where and to whom we are born, what languages we speak, who we are attracted to or what we inherit from our ancestors materially or genetically – is manifested in ‘where’ we are in the world. The position of our bodies in space directs our choices as well as anticipates our access to and relation with objects.

Applying the language of queer phenomenology to the political, social and cultural reality of Israel-Palestine recognises the need to rearticulate the investigation of settler-colonialism in terms of bodies in space. It prescribes a different set of questions to those that can emerge from psychoanalytical or Marxist accounts: how are bodies oriented in the spaces that occur within, and as a result of, a settlement project? How do the ways bodies inhabit spaces ‘orientate’ them as ‘settler’ or as ‘native’, as ‘indigenous’ or ‘exogenous’? What bodies are extended – able to act – by spaces of settler colonialism and what bodies are not, and in what ways? Returning to the image from the Gazan March of Return, we may paraphrase Ahmed in asking what work takes place for the demonstrators to be oriented, to ‘be seen’, as Palestinians? And – as
indigenous subjects – to be seen at all? In this specific example, as in the ones that preoccupy the following chapters, this work involves performance. My research hence interrogates the work of performance - as the semiotic signification of bodies and objects in space – that is deployed between bodies and spaces, between subjects and landscapes, participating in the re-orientation of bodies in order to bring them into or out of view.

The rules of the space that the demonstrators inhabit in the very moment that the picture is taken are dictated by the structure of colonial-settlement. These rules make or unmake who the protestors are in the most real, corporeal and necropolitical sense. Inside the fence, as refugees in Palestinian Gaza, they are subject to an ongoing siege, poverty and consistently deteriorating living conditions, and occasional air-raids of the Israeli Defence Force. If they move to the other side of the fence, or merely attempt to do so, they are regarded as ‘terrorists’ and ‘infiltrators’ and therefore are at risk of getting shot by soldiers. On both sides of the fence, their orientation in space – the location of their bodies – articulates the justifications for their lives’ precarity, while being subjected to an ongoing structural but disavowed campaign of gradual elimination.

In fact, it is the very division of space – its confinement (the Gaza strip and its enclosure), the means of this division and the means of controlling it – that orients both the protestors and their protest. In Ahmed’s formulation, space is organised through the labour of repetition of actions that brings bodies into view in a specific way, it forms lines in relation to which bodies are oriented. Orientation in this case can be understood as the way the demonstrators’ bodies are (usually) perceived as racialised, as Palestinian, as Gazan or as Hamas-sent terrorists – as emanating from their position in space. However, when standing costumed as the fictional Navis and holding in their bare hands the barbed wire that divides territorial, symbolic and biopolitical space, something happens to their orientation and, consequently (following Ahmed), to the space itself.

In adapting the Navi symbol, the demonstrators bring into view the ‘background’ of the settler-colonial structure. Ahmed arrives at her conception of the background in reviewing Husserl’s phenomenological-exercise, in which he outlines the workings of perception by a careful description of his attempt to ‘perceive’ his writing table (Ahmed 2006:28-9). She notes that his orientation towards the table implies the habitual relegation of the surroundings of the table to the background. This becomes obvious as political when Husserl’s (philosophical) bracketing-out includes not only other objects in the room but also his children, wife and, significantly, the
domestic labour that enables his intellectual work. Ahmed concludes that ‘a background’ is therefore ‘what explains the conditions of emergence or an arrival of something as the thing that it appears to be in the present’ (38). I propose that the settler-colonial structure functions as such background, as ‘that which is behind actions that are repeated over time and with force, and that insofar as it is behind does not come into view’ (87). Therein lies the decolonising effect of the Navi image – its background features the objects of the reality of resistance as such the flag, the tents and the land itself – and in the foreground the costumed protestors force the conditions of arrival of these objects into view. The theatrical (mimetic; representational) juxtaposition is what enables protesters to penetrate settler-disavowal.

The first configuration that Ahmed provides for the workings of disavowal is that of a line, a result of repetitions of assertions and actions, ‘that accumulate as signs of history to become institutional givens’ (136). Bringing the background into view is therefore achieved by means of resisting repetition and stepping, or standing, out of line. Ahmed reintroduces and re-centres the otherwise-marginal concept from Merleau-Ponty’s work of the ‘oblique’; the ‘slantwise’; taken by her to mean ‘queer’ (one of the word’s original meanings; 161). As normative phenomenological space is organised in vertical and horizontal lines, the oblique is in conflict with the very means of perception. In the Navi image the oblique can be traced on two levels. In the phenomenology of settler-colonial space (made normal), the indigenous is oblique, oriented slantwise to the lines of the structure of settlement. Ahmed provides the understanding that what is oblique faces ‘straightening devices,’ phenomenological strategies that work to correct it (171). The abundance of mechanisms of elimination – operating as either transfer/expulsion, inclusion and absorption (of indigenous subjects into the settlers’ body politics), appropriation or unrecognition of history – call work to straighten the ‘indigenous oblique’. Their marker in the image is the fence that literally forms a line in space. But indigenous resistance simultaneously forms lines that crystallises position, orientating, towards both settler and indigenous social spaces. Arguably, these lines of repeated actions and assertions of resistance are themselves in danger of being straightened-up and thus ‘invisibilised’ and defused. When the protesters perform as Navi, they step out of line and appear oblique not only in relation to the lines of Zionist settler structures but also to these of Palestinian resistance, bringing into view the ‘conditions of arrival’ of this resistance, its cause

12 In Husserl ‘bracketing-out’, also ‘excluding’ or ‘parenthesising’, indicates a ‘radical alteration of the natural positioning’, implying the conscious exclusion of parts of perceptions that interfere with an objective (pure) observation (Husserl and Welton 1999: 63).
and essence (38). In other words, the Navi facilitate the ‘disalignment’ of Palestinian indigeneity (172). The chapters of this thesis retrace such ‘disalignments’ of performances that either appear oblique or consciously attempt to generate its effect within settler culture and by settler subjects. Furthermore, it questions the means by which disalignment may turn to alliance, that is, to realign with the oblique, becoming what is termed by Ahmed a ‘disorientation device’ (ibid).

**Phenomenology of Borders**

One point of divergence between Ahmed’s work and my own is in the phenomenological configuration of the immigrant. Working on and through her biography as a mixed-race daughter of an immigrant father (146), Ahmed posits a somewhat universalising notion of those who do not live in the place of their birth, non-natives. She takes the ontological position of the immigrant to be indicated by disorientation, both regarding the failure to extend the body in a foreign place/space (find your way around) as well as in the disruption of spatial-temporal contingency that is the diaspora (176). When transposed to a settler-colonial space, this understanding proves problematic on several levels. Firstly, immigrants constituting themselves as pioneers are those who gradually shape the geopolitical space and, consequently, phenomenological space in a settler-colony. This space ‘takes their form’ as Ahmed would have it, its new lines designed to extend settlers’ bodies to the extent of (or concomitant with) the elimination of the indigenous; phenomenologically, this is precisely what a settlement process means. Those are the indigenous who did not emigrate and whose entire ‘native’ space transforms around, from familiar to foreign, from enabling and reaffirming to disabling and negating. It is a situation where one becomes disoriented while not going anywhere; the lines around them are the ones to shift and reconstitute them as oblique. Internal displacement or expulsion and the process of becoming refugees are integral to settler projects and create realities which are, of course, closer to Ahmed’s idea of the immigrant and its disorientation. My focus here is on the example of the transformation of space around a subject (as opposed to the transition of a subject to a new place) as it is peculiar to the settler-colonial political reality and essential for the understanding of its operations. While becoming a refugee may be contingent with the national discourse of state (even by marking the exception to citizenship), occupation, and fleeing from war, it is less tangible in light of a gradual process through which
one’s own home turns against one, and one’s own environment ceases to extend one’s body, language, and subjectivity.

In her short poem ‘Stream,’ the Jaffa-based Palestinian poet Sheikha Haleiwa captures and illustrates this state of disorientation, the incompatibility of an indigenous subject, memory, and space with the lines that make up settler space:

I don’t care for the stream by my dead village at the feet of Carmel Mountain
I don’t care for the highway that separated the shacks from the stream
I don’t care for Jewish settlement beyond the stream (I hated its glimmering lights at night)
I don’t care how deep the stream is or what its name, which I never cared to remember
I do care to remember why I almost drowned in it
And why I didn’t.  

Haleiwa’s poem sketches a map of her native home, an unrecognised Palestinian village. While maps, and especially road-maps, usually serve to orientate us, Haleiwa’s map is a mapping of disorientation, wherein a highway features as a straight line that cuts across. Explicitly, the highway divides the homes (shacks) of the village from its source of life (the stream), where implicitly the highway is the line of separation between the village and the settlement (that is beyond the stream). We can assume that before the highway was there, the stream was an integral part of the village life, that the village was aligned with it and, following Ahmed, that the stream ‘extended’ the body of the village, allowing its people to act in the world. The majority of unrecognised villages in Israel do not have any access-roads to them (nor other basic infrastructure or services), so no line connects the village to the highway. An official road here seamlessly embodies the meaning of a line in Ahmed, the existence in reality of secondary or makeshift (oblique) roads only serve to highlight this. The village remains disconnected, disoriented, and oblique to the line of the highway. Its name, as well as the name of the stream, are of no significance to Haleiwa. Names and naming are vital in settler-colonial sites, as the playwright Brian Friel illustrates in his celebrated play Translations, exploring the predicaments of the administrative procedure of replacing Gallic names by English ones for

14 The collective category for Palestinian villages and towns that were not recognised by the State of Israel after 1948 and are therefore ineligible by Israeli law to any municipal or state service including basic infrastructure, building permits, health, education etc.

Interestingly, in Friel’s play, names themselves are referred to as contours, the outer lines that describe an object’s shape: ‘it can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of … fact’ (2001: 52). But Haleiwa does not (cannot) align herself with either the highway or with the indigenous ‘linguistic contour’ of the name of the stream. The poem’s closing line discloses the purpose of her map: it is there to mark the site where Haleiwa did not drown, where she survived, whatever meaning or name this survival may bear in a settler-colonial space where lines continue to negate her existence, in relation to which she is inevitably positioned diagonally. Haleiwa here rejects the alignment with the lines of both Zionist and Palestinian national spaces, the settlement and the highway are foreign and irrelevant to her, in the same way as a reminiscence of a pastoral pre-contact village or the recounting of indigenous names. The only place she can be found in her own map is in the negative space of the ‘not,’ and in ‘not drowning.’ The significance of negative spaces in settler archives and cartography to decolonisation is discussed in length in the Part 2 of this thesis. In the following section, I will examine the way the borders of Israel function as (phenomenological) lines, contouring phenomenological settler-space, and consequently, how actions and gestures of crossing, passing, and infiltrating are to be understood as simultaneously generative and subversive in this context. This section will also mark the field in which the research of this thesis takes places, its sites, main themes and underlying research questions, in turning to autoethnography as a method of phenomenological study of settler culture.

Borders as Lines

One major phenomenological line of the kind conceived by Ahmed oriented the psychogeography of my childhood. This line was formed of the coastal highway that connects Tel-Aviv and Haifa (road number 2), and later the one connecting Haifa and Rosh-Hanikra / Ras el Nakura, the most north-western point on the Israeli map, on the line of the border with Lebanon (road number 4). Within my subjective phenomenology, both roads connected to one line, in
relation to which my world’s spatial orientation is organised. On the southern end of it is the kibbutz in which I grew up and on the northern end my maternal-ancestral kibbutz, less than fifteen minutes’ drive from the border. These two locales feature in this research firstly as spatiotemporal markers, as autobiographical reference points in my investigation of settler culture. Secondly, they are themselves the archive – the depository of evidence, artefacts, and documents – in which a major part of this work takes place. Due to my methodological choice to retrace, theorise, and critique the ontological makeup of settler culture in the Zionist context through my own life experience, these two ‘points of origin’ are of paramount relevance. In the following, I unpack the experience of the movement between them as foundational to the shaping of my recollection of border-sites and as a point of departure to theorise the seminal role of border-work in settler culture.

As lines are the result of repetitions, this spatial line was etched by regular trips to the north, where the Mediterranean frequently reappears on the left-hand side of the car or train, forming a continual presence. This continuity stops abruptly once the car faced the tall mountain ridges of South Lebanon. Perhaps because the two coordinates of my family’s kibbutzim marked the range of what I recognised as home (as ‘my own’), I registered the intersection of the line of the border in Rosh-Hanikra with the line of the highway (‘my line’) as an epistemological limit; a final and complete ‘end of the road,’ literal and ontological. This experience repeated whenever I visited my family in the north-eastern Golan Heights or on family and school trips to the South-Eastern Dead Sea or the city of Eilat on the southernmost tip of the country. Gradually, this feeling became as concrete as walls in the interiors of a house. Contrary to depictions of the border as evoking (‘presencing’) the wonders or dangers that lay beyond it,¹⁵ I cannot recall any particular preoccupation with what might exist beyond the layers of the barbed-wire fences, or the signs that announce the presence of a mine-field. I cannot tell what meaning (or rather non-meaning) my perception attached to the sights of landscapes, towns, and vegetation clearly visible on the other side of the border, and which I was so used to facing.

The three-dimensional experience of space seems to have been replaced at the point of encounter with the border by one that is closer to the experience of two-dimensional painted

¹⁵ I refer here, for example, to philosopher Martin Heidegger’s association of boundary with horizon, wherein ‘a boundary is not that at which something stops but […] that from which something begins its presencing’ (Heidegger 1975: 152). The fact that postcolonial literary scholar Homi Bhabha chose this to be the epigraph of the introduction to his influential The Location of Culture is highly indicative both of the pervasiveness of this conception as well as of the disparities that may emanate between the traditions of postcolonial theory and the realities of settler-colonialism (Bhabha 1994: 1).
flats at the back of a theatre stage. Secondary knowledge that I have gained through family stories, such as of my father’s experiences in Beirut during the First Lebanon War (1982) or these of my grandfather’s in Sinai in the Six-Day War (1967), were not associated with the sight of what is beyond the border nor accompanied by thoughts about who or what might be there. In other areas of life, such as in the perception of natural environments, historical sights, food, and clothes, family stories were indispensable in the weaving of a coherent sense of self. Attached to objects and physical environments, stories extended my young settler body in time and space, providing a heightened feeling of purpose and agency to be and act in the world. In almost direct opposition to the role of stories and memories to extend bodies across time and space in diasporic modes of being, in the case of the border, the stories stopped where the body did.

The reckoning with what is beyond the border and, therefore, with what the border is, involves the work of bringing to the foreground the ways by which the border came to be. In other words, we may ask how did (and does) the relations (lines) of settler-subjects with the border develop. The constitution and operation of borders is seminal to the understanding of culture within them; indeed, they are co-generative. Ahmed discusses borders as the ‘skin of the social’, one that ‘feels and is shaped by the “impressions” of others’ (Ahmed 2006:9). Significantly relying on Merleau-Ponty, she reminds us that our bodies are our primary orientation device, the zero-point from which dimensions, distances, and relations are measured. Due to the particular demands of the operation of settler-colonialism, borders in Israel-Palestine serve to both control and obfuscate the realities of bodies, aberrational in their constant flux when considered against the ontological configuration of the fixed ‘walled’ borders of a nation-state (Brown 2014). While indigenous subjects experience the ongoing work of borders in their most immediate living conditions (control of movement, food supplies, jobs etc.), settler subjects work to disavow their instability, indeterminacy, and ambivalence. If, in following Ahmed, we understand the border as the skin of a collective – its largest organ that facilitates most of its sensual perception – then disavowing it, or at least misperceiving it, incurs a significant disruption to the ability of the (collective) body to orientate itself. Its position and function as a phenomenological zero-point is continuously undermined or, as I argue, is systematically and strategically eradicated.

16 While previous studies of the relationship of culture to borders focused on site of the order itself, (Anzaldúa 2012; Madrid 2011; Rivera-Servera and Young 2010) this work is directed at the relation between border-work to cultural values, formations, and phenomena in society at large.
Karl Schmidt acknowledged the sovereign's power to suspend the Constitution in times of threat to the well-being of the state. In Giorgio Agamben's scholarship the ‘state of exception’ gained currency in the critique of the policing and surveillance measures utilised in the post-9/11 ‘War on Terror’ (Agamben 2005). Officially operating under a state of ‘emergency’ since its conception, the State of Israel is a typical case of such ‘eternal exception.’ This condition is often discussed in relation to the violation of human rights, the military control of the occupied territories, the racialisation of Palestinians, and the state’s brutal use of force (Lentin 2018; Svirsky and Bignall 2012). However, little attention has been given to its long-lasting influences on the Israeli public discourse and collective consciousness and even more so on culture, particularly in the context of collective perception and the imagination of borders and the bodies that cross or are prevented from crossing them.17 Theatre and performance studies scholar Sophie Nield, building on the work of Agamben, suggests that the state of exception ‘effectively creates the conditions in which the whole nation-state is endowed with the equivalent spatial indeterminacy of a border; [it] is constructed as a non-place that, potentially, leaves identity compromised and attendant rights fugitive’ (Nield 2008: 142). What, then, is the discursive and symbolic nature of the borders of a state that function as a border in its entirety (a border of a border) and what is the status, or power, of those who attempt to cross its borders? Furthermore, if settler-space functions as a border, then border-crossing and infiltration become inevitable modes of being and acting in it, rather than marginal anomalous activities.

One of Israel’s constitutive attributes is its isolation from its surroundings. Both left- and right-wing Jewish political collectives emphatically accept the image of Israel as a foreign element, a ‘Villa in a Jungle’ (Bar-Yosef 2013).18 In his work on the spatial and architectural paradigms of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, architect Eyal Weizman's theorises the physical

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17 One notable exception within the social sciences that informs my study is the work of sociologist Marcelo Svirsky on divestment from Zionist identities by engaging with dissent rationalities, practices, and institutions (Svirsky 2014; Svirsky and Bignall 2012).

18 Studies which have resurfaced this tendency for imagined spatial detachment focused on the ways by which Africa and Africans are imagined in Israeli culture and political discourse. Sociologist Haim Yacobi and cultural historian Eitan Bar-Yosef both outlined how traditions of Zionism imagined-geography clashed, or were undermined by geopolitical realities such as the arrival by foot of asylum seekers from East-African countries to Israel (Bar-Yosef 2013; Yacobi 2015).
barriers that ‘theatrically’ represent the border as ‘attempts to display the reassuring iconography of [...] a contiguous political border’ (Weizman 2007: 179). The abundance of explicit visual ‘iconographies’ of control and confinement of space in Israel-Palestine such as high walls, elaborate fences, mined strips of land, roadblocks and road signs, paradoxically evidence the lack of such contingency. Furthermore, the ‘impenetrability’ of the border is often conflated with the perceived ‘invincibility’ of the IDF, as securing the borders is often seen as the most undisputed, justified, and ethical of all of IDF’s functions and endeavours.

Notwithstanding the formidability of such monuments as the separation barrier in Jerusalem or the barbed wire fence of Israel’s southern border, a review of the historical dynamic of Israel’s borders and their indeterminate legal status reveals quite a different state of affairs. Since Israel’s declaration of independence in May 1948, its borders have been disputed. As the sociologist Adriana Kemp demonstrates, border indeterminacy is not only a result of the unresolved matter of the 1948 Palestinian refugees or the international legal status of the Green Line (the legality of Israel’s presence in the territories seized in 1967). Israeli leadership of the 1950’s developed two contradicting ‘languages’ of the border: a ‘territorial language’ presenting the border as a ‘1,000 kilometres of a wall of lead’ that separate countries and unite nations on one hand, and on the other hand a ‘spatial language’ that depicts the border as a ‘limbo’, a penetrable frontier, ‘undermining the Cartesian geometric definition of a border and blurring distinctions of “inside” and “outside” or ‘here’ and there’ (Kemp 2000: 20). While the former definition sustains the border as a national icon, the latter paradoxically implies that the border comes into being by constantly being breached and reasserted.

Daniel Bar-Tal is a scholar of collective psychology who researches positions and perceptions of the ‘Israeli-Arab conflict’ in the Israeli public discourse. He describes ‘Siege Mentality’ as a public feeling of being trapped and persecuted by an acutely hostile environment, resulting in mistrust and hostility towards members of other groups (Bar-Tal et al. 2009). This pervasive mental meta-construct of a ‘sea of hatred’ threatening to engulf Israel is actively formed, transmitted and disseminated through a combination of societal, political, educational and cultural agents (Amir 2012), and plays a fundamental role in the reproduction of Jewish-Israeli identity and unity (Bar-Tal et al. 2009; Enns 2012). The work of Bar-Tal and others suggest that the site of the border is constituted in collective consciousness (mentality) no less than in maps (i.e. law) or through physical barriers (i.e. body). They provide a tangible application to
Ahmed’s assertion that ‘space acquires “direction” in how bodies inhabit it, just as bodies acquire direction in this inhabittance’ (Ahmed 2006:12).

It is also within this gap between, and interplay of, the imagined and the concrete (the discursive and the corporal) that images are forged in the theatre. Neither the subjective imagination of a spectator nor the images produced by a performer (human or object) are in themselves sufficient for theatre to come-into-being. It is the interface of the two in a public setting that is the locus of the theatrical (in the theatre). We can think of the three levels in which borders are constituted as allegorically parallel to the three spaces of traditional proscenium-arch theatre. The set and costumed actors constitute the corporal-material devices, which, like walls and checkpoints, work in tandem with a specific plot or narrative, such as the borders drawn on a map, the two attaining their full efficacy only when integrated within the spectators’ minds. However, the impact of such an effect is possible only as long as the conventions of its production are agreed upon and respected by both performers and spectators. The efficacy of the theatrical image depends on the physical-aesthetic distance of the spectators from the site where the images originate. In other words, the audiences must stay in their seats. In the following section, I examine two constitutive perceptual dynamics that characterise the work of ontological border-making in Israeli public discourse: the settler tendency towards sedentarism and the Janus-faced configuration of the infiltrator. These, I argue, intimately define the relations of settler subjects and the borders that they imagine and construct as well as their orientation towards the sites of border making.

**Settler Sedentarism**

Ahmed’s idea of the line is again useful here as it allows us to think of the border as the assemblage of repetitions that sustains specific relations between bodies and spaces. ‘If lines are traces of other lines’ she notes, ‘then alignment depends on straightening devices that keep things in line, in part by “holding” things in place’ (Ahmed 2006: 66). The image of the border as fixed, unmovable, and normally non-passable is sustained by Jewish-Israelis’ inability (as in the case with the Lebanese and Syrian borders) or unwillingness (as is widely the case with the Jordanian and Egyptian) to travel across their land borders. Israelis’ common knowledge of what lies beyond the border is therefore institutionally mediated by definition. Government and
military public warnings, as well as reports from specialised media reporters, routinely
discourage Jewish Israelis from gaining their own experienced knowledge of the border – one
that is based on their own testimony.

Political theorist Hagar Kotef explores the relationships between freedom and movement in the
liberal tradition of thought, particularly in relation to the Israeli regime of occupation, described
by her as a ‘regime of movement’ (2015: 5). Kotef delineates a process when ‘first citizenship
has to rely on a process of "taming mobility", which serves to support the sedentary ideology
of the nation-state within a factuality wherein people are, and were, always mobile’ (11).
Imagery of sedentarism is indeed most evident in Israel’s language of citizenship. The
etymology used by the state for a non-citizen legal resident (toshav דושא) derives from the
Hebrew verb for ‘seating’ (ya.sh.v ובוש), also used for ‘being grounded’ (as do the words for:
‘colony’ - moshava הבושה and ‘settler’ mityashev מתיישב). However, the word used for the more
privileged position of a citizen (ezrach חרזא), according to several accounts (Rosental 2014),
originates from a biblical term for a ‘tree.’ In this way, even the sterile jargon of bureaucracy
is founded on a latent hierarchy of nomadism and groundedness, a tree being the epitome of
belonging to a place (rooted) but incapable of moving about (grounded). Hence the ideal of
citizenship is narrated in discourse as non-movement, as stasis; the most movement a tree is
capable of is flying a flag.

Wolfe and Veracini both locate sedentarism as a discursive as well as operational imperative of
settler societies. Veracini turns to the anthropologist Ana María Alonso who perceptively
identified a Western “sedentarist metaphysics” and outlined its perception of territorial
displacement as inherently pathological” (Alonso 1994 in Veracini 2008: 3–4). He then
confers that ‘if this is relevant for much of Western civilisation, where wandering Jews and nomadic
“Gypsies”, for example, are classically pathologised in various ways, it is more emphatically
so as regards a settler body politic, where the need to emphasise settler fixity encourages the
perception of indigenous and migrant ‘others’ as ‘unsettled’, and where projections of a
nomadic state are used as a strategy to draw different circles of inclusion and exclusion and to
deny entitlements in a settler polity’ (ibid). Resonating the equivalence of citizens to trees, as
well as the abundance of imagery of fields and fruit groves that accompanied my frequent trips
to the kibbutz in the north, Wolfe articulates the relevance of agriculture to settlers’ oppositional
identity of sedentarism. He argues that
in addition to its objective economic centrality to the project, agriculture, with its life-sustaining connectedness to land, is a potent symbol of settler-colonial identity. Accordingly, settler-colonial discourse is resolutely impervious to glaring inconsistencies such as sedentary natives or the fact that the settlers themselves have come from somewhere else. Thus, it is significant that the feminized, finance-oriented (or, for that matter, wandering) Jew of European antisemitism should assert an aggressively masculine agricultural self-identification in Palestine. The new Jew’s formative other was the nomadic Bedouin rather than the fellahin farmer. The reproach of nomadism renders the native removable (Wolf 2006: 396).

The spatial configuration of settler sedentarism is sketched (‘staged’ even) in the first line of a popular Israeli folk song performed to the new year, in which the lyricist wishes that ‘in the next year we shall seat on the balcony and count nomadic birds.’\(^{19}\) The ideal situation for the collectivised protagonist (we) is a stationary one, positioned as in the box of a theatre, when the sedentary position is reaffirmed (indeed marked) by moving objects in front of the audience. Temporally featured as birds, the variable in contrast to the constant ‘seating’/’sitter’ (also means ‘settlement’/’settler’ in Hebrew respectively) confirms the provenance and untimeliness of the latter (as saying ‘I was already sitting here when the birds arrived and will remain seated long after they moved on’). For Ahmed, ‘what is faced by a collective is also what brings it into existence. As such, the object “in front” of the “we” might be better described as “behind” it, as what allows the “we” to emerge’ (2006: 119). As a line, the border becomes invisible to the sedentary settler – out of view – and it can only reappear by being interrupted, crossed, trajected, or infiltrated, much in the fashion by which the movement of birds indicates settlers’ fantasy of non-movement. While various straightening devices attempt to restore its invisibility, that is, to re-align those movements, gestures, and actions that break from the border-line and suggest other potential orientations – the examination of these very mechanisms pertains to the work of bringing to the foreground the border’s conditions of emergence.

**Infiltration as Border-(un)Making**

Travelling along the line up to the north was fundamentally tied to and inevitably shaped by a historical event that traversed the spheres of the personal familial and the collective-national.

\(^{19}\) *BaShana HaBa’a* (In the Next year), written by Ehud Manor in 1968, performed originally by the dou Ilan and Ilanit in 1970.
Ever since I can remember, twice a year we would drive all the way to the border to participate in commemoration ceremonies for my uncle. An IDF soldier, at the age of eighteen he was killed in an incident in which two PLO combatants infiltrated the border fence near Kibbutz Hanita, a few kilometres north of my mother’s kibbutz and east of Rosh-Hanikra. My visits to the border were, therefore, a routine practice, the phenomenology of which intersected family lines with topographic, historical, and ideological ones. This intersection was a point in which certain lines ended, such as the life-line of my uncle or the line of the road leading to the border. Simultaneously, other lines began from it, such as the line of my own relation to the political reality I grew up in or the line of expectations set up by society for me to continue the line of my uncle’s military heroism, to ‘follow in his footsteps.’ A large block of limestone, typical of the Galilee area that carries his name, date of birth and date of death, stands on the site where he was killed. In my earlier childhood, the area surrounding the stone was covered by natural vegetation which merged seamlessly with the grove that spread from the road down to the valley, alluding to its relation to and place in the natural order (Figure 2). In recent years the kibbutz expanded, a new neighbourhood was built, and the stone became the centre of a small memorial garden, surrounded by fruit trees and suburban-style cottages, retrospectively making clear its relation to and place in the process of settlement. The community of the kibbutz is aligned with the memorial stone not only by the contingency of houses and roads but also with generations of school children treading and retreading the path to the memorial stone for every ceremonial event (Figure 4). The scenography of these ceremonies is arranged according to the phenomenological lines which reproduce them and which in turn they reproduce. By facing the stone southwards, towards the valley and the view of the Mediterranean (as in Figure 5), the backs of the gathered crowd are turned to the border, to the place from which the PLO combatants came (a curious position when the border is configured as ‘the source of danger’). The frequent appearance of a border patrol vehicle or the figures of soldiers at a distance suggests that whatever is on that side of the space is of no interest, it is being ‘taken care of.’ Read through the ontological language of a theatre stage, these function as stagehands, lights, and rigs, enabling the performance by being relegated to the background and out of site/sight. The ceremony therefore narrates the (hi)story of my uncle’s death while facing away from the border, where the stone that marks the end of his life appears as a beginning of a story, the conditions of its emergence and these of the reality it signifies are disavowed. Even now, when I try to imagine this ceremony taking place in any alternative spatial configuration it does not feel right; the site itself is already oriented and so is the story.
Figure 2 (top left): The memorial stone of my uncle Eliav, Kibbutz Hanita (1980’s).

Figure 3 (top right): Memorial Day ceremony at the same site, from a video uploaded to YouTube (2013). Kibbutz Hanita website.

Figure 4: (middle) My grandmother (front) and my mother orientating themselves at the site that changed during the construction of the new neighbourhood. (2011).

Figure 5 (bottom): Starlight image of Hanita from 2019, indicating the site of the memorial stone in the new neighbourhood. Google Maps.
The two PLO combatants who killed my uncle and who were immediately killed themselves became my earliest and most personal signifier for ‘Mistanenim’ (Hebrew: infiltrators). The term first crystallised as a political and legal denomination around Israel’s policies of prevention and evacuation of Palestinian refugees immediately after the 1948 war (Morris 2004). Between December 1947 and November 1948, the majority of Palestinians were evacuated by force or fled their homes either out of fear of violence or death. Many of them tried to return to their homes after the August 1948 cease-fire (ibid). Between 1948 and 1956 the classification of ‘infiltrators’ applied to any Palestinian who did not carry a registration certificate. The army issued these certificates following a census carried out in September 1948. Initially, the term ‘infiltrators’ was applied regardless of individuals’ intentions or ability to attain such certificate (Bracha 1998; Ronen 2002; Morris 2004). ‘Therefore, people who did not exit Israel's borders but for different reasons did not get a registration certificate were classified as infiltrators and were deported, or incarcerated and then deported’ (Ronen, 2002). Evidence shows that the majority of Palestinians who were charged with ‘infiltration’ between 1948 to 1954 were motivated by 'economic' reasons, as their source of income often came from their land, fields and crops (Bracha 1998; Ronen 2002). Through legislation and government policy united in etymology, the term ‘infiltrators’ classified those who belonged to the ‘other side of the border’, serving as the very means to produce a border. Simultaneously it served to design Israeli perceptions and procedures of citizenship, immigration and border crossing (Bracha 1998). The ‘border’, in this case, emerges not so much as a barrier erected or as a fence installed but rather as the action of settling people while evacuating others. Moreover, this mechanism featured the image of a performed corporal action – infiltration – as a discursive means to produce both the ‘enemy’ and the ‘defender.’

The photography theorist Ariella Azoulay studies photographs of 1948 Palestine in Zionist archives and their ontological, philosophical, and political status as looted documents. In retracing the figure of the infiltrator in these archives, she explains:

Being a product of violence, the infiltrator should not be studied as such—that is, as an object of knowledge that can be tracked down in documents—but rather in relation to the citizen who, in being differentiated from the infiltrator, participates in the latter category’s fabrication [...]. The persistence of the figure of the infiltrator, I argue, is evidence of the ongoing violence and dispossession embedded in the institutions of citizenship, archives, and scholarship in places where such a category has been naturalized into the discourse (Azoulay 2017:11).
Her findings from the close examination of images which only recently became publicly available confirm the vast gap between the practices of forced expulsions and deportations and the rhetoric of illegal trespassing and its associated imagery. She therefore concludes that ‘infiltrators cannot exist anywhere except in the archive, preferably in Israeli archives, and cannot persist there unless Israeli Jews collaborate in their fabrication […] the study of the figure of the infiltrator cannot but be the study of his pair, the figure of the Israeli citizen, whose existence is predicated upon the infiltrator’s existence’ (16). Azoulay’s work supports the understanding of the Palestinian infiltrator as an imagined construct that informs not only the construction and perception of citizenship but also, as I argue, the orientation of settler-bodies in space and their relation to a/the border. When I inherited (or, was ‘handed down’ by my family) the term Mistanen along with the story and memory of my uncle’s death, the term was already oriented, its conditions of arrival dormant at the background. Paradoxically, it is through bringing to the foreground the conditions of arrival of the infiltrator that the death of my uncle becomes contextualised in a broader, complex, and ambivalent network of settler-colonialism.

Contemporaneously with the emergence of the trope of the infiltrator, a somewhat parallel ethos of border-crossing, that of the journeys to the Red Rock (Hasela Ha’adom), also developed. Far from the institutional and judicial labour that was invested in the category of the infiltrators, the illegal journeys of young Israelis to Petra in Jordan during the 1950s and 1960s acquired a status of exceptional and sensational acts of heroism (Shafran 2013). The fifteen twenty-something-year-olds did in fact infiltrate – that is, illegally crossed a national border – to Jordan while only three returned alive. The public interest in these incidents led to the creation of a feature film and a popular song that fixed the myth as a milestone in Israeli culture. Sociologist Nessia Shafran relates the incentive to embark on the illegal journeys to Petra to the unwillingness of people who grew up in Mandate Palestine during the 1920s and 1930s to accept the new borders of the state. She notes that the first groups who went did not imagine they might get killed as such civilian border-crossings were frequent on the Syrian and Lebanese borders and had no significant consequences (Shafran 1979). Its glaring (implied) sense of superiority notwithstanding, the obliviousness to the danger of border crossing outside of Israel in a time where a policy of open fire was enacted on Palestinians in case of suspected infiltration into the state highlights the perception of the border as a unilateral, unidirectional, and discriminatory entity. In this perspective, the deadly border breechings are seen as an expression of undermining the borders conceptionally and spatially, demonstrating by means of the corporeal
act their inefficacy and inauthenticity. The ambivalent response of the state’s establishment – which on the one hand officially denounced the acts and even attempted to censor the 1960 film that narrated their story while on the other hand glorified the travellers as the epitome of the Sabra (the ideal Zionist settler) – is indicative of the calculated manipulations of the site, the function, and the symbolism of borders in the example of Zionist settler colonialism.

The notorious term ‘Mistanenim’ from the 1950s has resurfaced in Israeli public discourse in the last decade, now used to label approximately 50,000 immigrants from East African countries who had entered Israel from Egypt between 2005-2012 (Yacobi 2015). Eitan Bar-Yosef suggests that ‘the possibility of Africans penetrating Israel through the Egyptian border made it more difficult for Israelis to repress their geographic proximity’ to Africa (Bar-Yosef 2013: 258). Architect and sociologist Haim Yacobi notes ‘the flow of Africans to Israel via the Egyptian border is a reminder to Israelis that geography matters’ (Yacobi 2011: 65).

Ahmed would say that the arrival of asylum seekers forced Israelis to re-orient themselves so to ‘face’ Africa. While public debate revolves around the predicament posed by refugees to the Jewish majority in Israel (a prime settler concern), or the threat to ‘take jobs’, studies such as this of Yacobi reveal that the background to the sense of ‘danger’ ascribed to them is rooted in their interruption of Israel’s hegemonic ‘border-play.’ The ‘appearance’ of bodies in city centres, bus-stations and news reports in Israel, brings with it testimonies for and spatial meanings of geographic journeys (physical; corporal) and topographic (discursive; as represented on the map) spaces. Moreover, it links the two, conflates them, where otherwise they were separate, or, rather, their link was disavowed. As a result, the immigration of Sudanese and Eritreans to Israel is unique in its twofold disruption of hegemonic political discourse. The movement of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa into Israel unsettles not only the imagined impenetrability of the Israeli border but also its imagined location (altitude is after all a location on a line, indicated by its intersection with another line) by emphasising geographical proximity to Africa.

While the failure of the border to fulfil its prime goal - to control passage – could have resulted in a waning of efficacy of hegemonic border-image, it may actually have had the opposite effect. In a speech delivered in April 2016, the Israeli prime minister addressed the merits of the newly fortified wall that was built on Israel’s border with Egypt by encouraging his listeners to ‘think what would happen if the fence didn’t exist.’ Then he continues by sharing his own thoughts:
‘We would have been swarmed by thousands of Da’esh warriors from Sinai and hundreds of thousands of illegal labour infiltrators (Mistaneni-Avoda) from Africa. The fence curbed it all. [...] We must protect our borders’ (Ygena 2016). What Netanyahu’s speech invokes is the idea of the incorporation of refugees into the generalised threat that ‘lies beyond’ the border, fortifying siege-mentality. Reframed in such a way, what might have posed an interruption to hegemonic discourse of borders now serves to bolster it and what appeared oblique in its orientation to the line of the border is thus straightened.

Lacking legal status or work permits, groups of refugees from African countries were forced to dwell in parks in the south of Tel-Aviv for extended periods, exposed to the eyes of passers-by at any time in the day. Yacobi’s study shows that visibility was a major concern for many East-African refugees (Yacobi 2015: 116). When precariously exposed in public spaces, bodies of refugees become screens on which political statements such as Netanyahu’s are projected. The corporeal presence of refugees inside Israel, as well as any social distresses that are associated with their presence, can thus serve as a sample of testimony, a representation of the imagined threat that lies on the other side of the border. If the 1950s discursive construct of the ‘infiltrators’ appeared to be a method of border-making by means of evacuating Palestinian communities, the 2010s ‘Mistanenim’ is one of border-making by means of maintaining the presence of bodies, so to be re-staged in the hegemonic play of borders.

Protesting against a government deportation plan, asylum seekers demonstrated in the city centre of Herzliya in February 2018 (Figure 6). Their performance of whiteface seemed to attempt a similar effect to that of the Palestinian Navi demonstration in Gaza three weeks later. While the blue face paint was a means to reclaim indigeneity, the whiteface was a commentary on the dehumanisation of asylum seekers in Israel, their objectification and abuse. It was theatrical in the way that by drawing attention to the colour of their skin the demonstrators denormalised their image and in so doing made the spectator aware of their own spectating, and as a result their own positionality in a hierarchy of colourism. This is a form of resistance to being cast in the role of the ‘infiltrator’ with its violent legacy, where the use of white paint works to interfere with the projection of border-images on their bodies.
The two cases of performance and theatricality in a demonstration with which I open and close my discussion, and the preliminary experimentation with the use of queer phenomenology in the study of culture of settler-colonialism exemplify the symbolic, ideological, and political centrality of performance and theatricality in settler colonial reality. I take the complex, dynamic, and ever-shifting constructions of borders with their close ties to culture and identity which I have delineated above to be both the context of and the analytical framework for the study of performance in Israel-Palestine. Physical, symbolic, ideological, discursive, taxonomical border-lines work to disavow and relegate to the background the oppressive realities by which settler colonialism comes to be, making it appear (disguising it as) ahistorical and normal. In this thesis I will argue for the possibility of performance to challenge, activate, and defy lines, forcing the conditions of arrival of realities they neutralise into view, reintroducing them to the foreground. In attending to mechanisms of theatricality, such as the use of blue and white face-paint, I interrogate the capacity of performance to suspend sympathy and draw attention to the ontological position and the ideological conditions of spectating. In the following section I contextualise the phenomenological quality of such performances as the Navi blueface in Gaza and the refugee demonstrators’ whiteface in Herzliya as drag.
II
DRAG AND ARCHIVE: Towards Understanding Drag Phenomenologically

Failed Crossings

As I have demonstrated in the previous section, the violent charge of otherwise invisible borders is activated by the very attempt to cross them, that is, to intersect with them perpendicularly. Throughout my life I have experienced the lines of settler colonialism as booby-trapped. The following two incidents are examples of what I consider perpendicular intersection with border-lines of settler-colonial reality in Israel-Palestine and their disorienting failures.

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I was fifteen when the Second Intifada broke out, marking the complete failure of the Oslo peace-process, the discourse of which animated the political and cultural life of 1990s Israel-Palestine and oriented my early political phenomenology. The peace accords which were guided by a trajectory of establishing a Palestinian national entity alongside and without undermining that of Israel did little or nothing to curb the underlying settler-colonial infrastructures and practices of Zionism both in and outside Israel ‘proper’. For couple of years prior to October 2000, the youth movement I belonged to organised frequent meetings (‘dialogue meeting, they were called) between people from my town and people of our own age from Nablus in the West-Bank. These meetings often felt awkward and artificial; nonetheless we experienced them as highly significant, feeling that we were acting to undermine what we saw as the very root of the reality of occupation - separation and non-encounter (Veracini 2010: 76). We were told by our seniors and, consequently, genuinely felt that we were drawing new lines in a place where there weren’t any. Rather than an act of deviance, defiance, or treason (of national alignment), up until it stopped, the dialogue project felt closer to a gesture of pioneering and good citizenship. After the violence erupted, we did not meet our peers from Nablus for nearly six months. When we finally did, it was nothing like it had been before. The proto-symmetrical conduct of the sessions that previously ensured that equality was enacted between us (making use of both languages, taking time to translate, allocating equal amounts of time for participants to speak, emphasising the legitimate subjectivity and relativity of personal points of view etc.) made way for
a rather unilateral and expansive retelling of what our peers had experienced and witnessed in the past six months of IDF air raids, tank bombing, house demolitions, and open fire (the male participants often taking their shirts off to show bullet scars). Failing to match them with our own very real horror of suicide bombs in buses in Israeli city centres, or by enumerating the demonstrations and protests we had initiated to show opposition to the military aggression, we soon fell silent and simply listened. Still oriented by the spirit of Oslo, our facilitators encouraged us to formulate a joint public statement with specific demands to our respective governments as a bi-national youth group and have it published in the media. Though it felt specious, we conceded and were looking forward to returning from the lunch break to co-sign our document.

This never happened, as during lunch the leader of the group from Nablus was informed that a car-bomb had gone off outside his house. This happened only a few hours before a suicide bomber detonated a bomb in a busy shopping-mall in the coastal city of Netanya, killing five people and wounding over a hundred. Outside the dining hall of the conference centre, the Nablus group was arguing whether they should leave immediately to make sure they arrived home before a curfew began or to wait for the dark to minimise risk of West-Bank settlers attacking their car in an act of random retaliation. On the way back, my family informed me that my aunt and cousin were in the Netanya shopping mall when the bomb went off and that they were safe but severely traumatised. I think that the deep feeling of despair in which my friends and I were immersed when we arrived home to face the occasional collective sentiments of anger and hatred common in such events being expressed by our family members and neighbours was - at its core - a state of profound disorientation. None of the familiar lines of identity or orientation devices of making sense of the world were available to us that evening. The phenomenological lines of settler-reality that we had tried to undermine became concrete and immovable beyond any imagination or good intention.

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I was thirty-three when I was invited by a British friend, activist and performer, to partake in her initiative to organise an alternative Eurovision contest in London in protest against the 2019 Eurovision that was about to take place in Tel-Aviv. The
activist group included a Palestinian theatre director and an Israeli artist whom I had recruited, both based in London, while the rest of the group were all British. When I informed the activist friend, who invited me to the group, that my Israeli artist friend would be attending a different event that we organised together, she got nervous, telling me that this was not a good idea. She explained that in an email that was sent the week before, the Israeli artist wrote to the group that she was ‘going home to Israel for few weeks and was happy to help from there in the advancement of the project.’ Apparently, the Palestinian director was very upset at the Israeli artist’s use of the appellation ‘Israel’ and found it inappropriate and offensive, and my British activist friend was now concerned with what might happen if the two met each other during our event. While understanding and sympathising with the position of the Palestinian director who was routinely denied access to his family in Gaza, my British friend’s accusative tone and fear of what would happen should the two meet felt condescending to me. This soon evolved into a very personal and highly emotional argument I had never imagined I would have with this person. Decades apart, and on an entirely different scale, the suddenness and harshness of this argument and the intensity of effect it generated in me - being aligned with a multiplicity of subjective realities at once – caused me to feel desperately disorientated.

The timeline that stretches between the spring of 2001 and the winter of 2018 is dotted with countless moments of such disorientation, in which the direct, often inevitable, forward-facing intersections with the border-lines of identity and political-ethnic-national belonging and direction activated these lines into actual borders, denying the extension of my body and the bodies of others around me in space, denying us action. It is this accumulated experience and contemplation through performance-making, education, and activism that nourishes my interest in the oblique (diagonal; non-direct) and the queer (as articulated by Ahmed phenomenologically) as an approach to decolonisation of the settler in settler-colonialism.

This line of investigation emerged in my own performance practice most clearly when I created and began performing my drag persona - Tilda Death. The existence of Tilda Death preceded the composition of its performance text, it even preceded its drag. Tilda emerged spontaneously
and surprisingly as a comic relief during lunch-breaks in rehearsals for other, non-related projects. It became clear to me intuitively that there is a certain volatile charge in her that seeks expression. Being trained as an actor, drag was not a form that initially attracted me in itself, although I did witness its potency and appeal during acting-school assignments. Tilda started off as a character in the theatre, and only later did I come to recognise her as a drag persona, or rather, through her I learned to read my own articulation of the practice and tradition(s) of drag, vis-à-vis its conceptualisation in studies of queer theory and queer performance. It is primarily through my reflection on Tilda and the work with her that I approach the definition of the way I discuss, theorise, and question ‘drag’ and ‘dragging’ in this research. Based on my experimentation with her, I suggest the application of the discourse and, mainly, the phenomenology of drag to the theorisation of wide areas of Zionist settler-culture. However, before attending to Tilda, I first wish to locate my project within broader scholarly traditions of cross-dressing and drag, emphasising its intervention in and contribution to them.

Cross-dressing, Transvestism, Performativity, Masquerade

Scholars of theatre, performance, and culture have traditionally studied drag within the context of what theatre historian Roger Baker titles ‘history of female impersonation in the performing arts’ (1994).20 These studies emphasis the function of female-impersonators in the history of theatre (such as on the Greek, Roman, Elizabethan, Kabuki and Noh stages), its re-emergence in queer (predominantly gay) sub-cultures in the nineteenth and mostly twentieth centuries, and its gradual progression into mainstream culture, first through popular entertainers (Dame Edna, Madea) and later as global commercial TV enterprises such as RuPaul’s Drag Race (Brennan and Gudelunas 2017). Such studies follow disciplinary inclinations (orientation), when attempting to construct drag as a performance genre, comparable to and combatable with other forms of labour in theatre and performance, albeit commonly marked as subversive and acentric amongst them. Baker’s definition of a drag queen is a telling example of the image of drag that emerges from this research tradition:

20 Other noteworthy examples of such historiographic projects are the earlier Dressing Up by the publicist Peter Ackroyd (1979), performance scholars Kris Kirk and Ed Heath’s Men in Frocks (1984), and the comprehensive study by the US theatre scholar Laurence Senelick, The Changing Room (2000).
The drag queen[‘s] […] mask […] allows her to take on the role of court jester, with privilege to challenge the laws of society and to crash through the boundaries that separate male from female. It is a role that has existed across the centuries, from ancient folkloric festivals that marked the changing seasons the pantomimes and cabarets of the twentieth century. When Lily Savage and Dame Edna Everage stalk onto the stage and fascinate their terrorised audience, they are recreating for us one of the oldest of our totems, becoming emblems of the unseen but ever-present tension between order and chaos (page number).

This approach constitutes drag as a Bakhtinian figure that fulfils certain roles within mainstream culture and its designated spaces for usurpation, where the familiar tropes of the carnivalesque or the ritualistic are conflated with it more or less explicitly (Morris 2007: 21). This lexical study of drag seems to cluster a wide range of disparate performance practices and contexts, smoothing over their differences and incorporating them into a cohesive epistemology based on a broad denominator of cross-dressing. Despite their invaluable role in documenting, recording, and drawing attention to multiple culturally marginalised sites of queer performance, when approached with the tools of queer phenomenology, these examples of the study of drag as a genre of ‘female impersonation’ appear to act as a straightening-device.

In my work with Tilda, the elements of the performance which fascinate and challenge me the most are those which are difficult to mark, evading definitions and alignments with other practices that are recognised or self-proclaimed as drag. The refusal of the act of performing Tilda and the very event of the performance to lend themselves to a generic framework are not mere conceptual concerns. They are expressed most challengingly in the very attempts to advertise this work, document, and disseminate it. Furthermore, the gesture of impersonating a woman – not an unproblematic assertion in itself even after the noun female is discarded – is to me indivisible from other embodied gestures and ‘impersonations’ that constitute Tilda, such as age, ethnicity, and ideology. I therefore turn the question of ‘what does drag do in culture’ that the scholarly tradition marked by Baker seems to be asking, to ‘what drag does to culture.’ In other words, my project interrogates drag as a phenomenological device, by observing the work of different modes of performance on lines of perception, in constructing, disturbing them, or both. The disparity, discontinuity, and multiplicity of contexts, styles, and politics of what is culturally grouped as drag is therefore the very material of my project rather than posing taxonomical obstructions to bypass or gloss over.
On the level of the use of the appellation ‘drag,’ there is no small (nor ignored) measurement of discursive borrowing here. While attempts to retrace the etymological origins of the term are surprisingly scarce, like Barker, theatre historian Laurence Senelick locates it in ‘back-stage [...] homosexual’ slang deriving from the drag of the train of a dress on the ground (Baker 1994:17; Senelick 2000:279). The hinging of the term not just on the item of clothing or its compatibility with the gender or sex of the wearer but in fact on a gesture or impression performed with and by it, is revealing in suggesting the centrality of the phenomenological workings of drag. What may be relegated to the background when dress is adorned by its culturally intended (approved) gendered subjects (women) is foregrounded when used ‘as’ drag and, in this way, exposes the conditions of arrival of the dress, of the labour of gendering, and of the performer/performance. Returning to Davis, the awareness to the act of spectatorship is a result of the action of wearing the dress, centralising its object-ness by dragging its train on the ground, rather than the mere fact of it being worn by the ‘wrong’ gendered or sexed subject. While ‘crossing’ and ‘impersonating’ as actions and as performances can over time be neutralised and co-opted as heteronormative, I locate drag in the quality of the oblique; that which does not sit comfortably with the horizontal and vertical lines of phenomenological space.

The emergence of the trope of drag as it is known and circulated in contemporary culture from gay vernacular speech and culture is significant, especially when attempting to expand and challenge its scope of use. Anthropologist Esther Newton, known for publishing the first conducive ethnography of drag performance in gay clubs in 1970s New York (Newton 1979), suggests an almost synonymous relationship between ‘gay’ and ‘drag’ when reasoning that ‘homosexuality is symbolised in America by transvestism - the homosexual term for a transvestite is “drag queen,” “Queen” is a generic noun for any homosexual man, "Drag" can be used as an adjective or a noun. As a noun it means the clothing of one sex when worn by the other sex’ (3). Culture theorist Marjory Garber is making a similar claim in her study of cross-dressing and cultural anxiety when asserting that ‘the story of transvestism in western culture is […] bound up with the story of homosexuality and gay identity, from “drag” and “voguing” to fashion and stage design, from the boy actors of the English Renaissance stage to Gertrude Stein and divine’ (Garber 1991: 4). Garber qualifies that though ‘cultural fascination with cross-dressing […] is not always consciously related to homosexuality […] homosexuality itself might be viewed as the repressed that always returns [in crossdressing]’ (5, emphasis in the
original). This vital reminder is more recently echoed in the work of performance scholar Stephan Farrier in which he criticises the proliferation of the use of drag outside its context of gay clubs and queer performance, or as a theoretical concept detached from actual practitioners and their bodies (Farrier 2014, 2017). Rather than losing sight of the original context of the term drag and its adjacent terminologies, my use of it tests the applicability of the practice’s relation with and negotiation of power and ideology from a phenomenological perspective, in contexts other than that of the Western gay club and its mainstream incarnations - be it Devine, Dame Edna, or the queens of RuPaul’s Drag Race. The essential and primary role of drag performance as a source of identity, community-building, and resistance to heteronormative and patriarchal systems of oppression does not only crucially inform my analysis of it in relation to settler-colonialism in Israel-Palestine but it is the site to which I return in my project through reflecting on my own drag and performance making and the recent developments in Tel-Aviv drag scene (see Epilogue).

Drag: The Incapacitation of Straightening Devices

Amidst the proliferation of both historical and contemporary practices and tropes of drag, and the genealogies of its extrapolation in feminist theory (Phelan 2005; Harris 1999), gender and queer studies (Butler 1993; Riviere 1929) as well as in studies of race and ethnicity (Sieg 2009; Hooks 1994) and postcolonialism (McClintock 1995), my work is invested in drag’s phenomenological quality of resisting straightening-devices. After Merleau-Ponty’s theorisation of the corrective mechanisms of perception, Ahmed regards as a straightening device the habitual reading (of either texts or images) ‘which corrects the slantwise direction of queer desire’ (Ahmed 2006: 72). In the context of race, Ahmed conceptualises whiteness itself as a straightening-device, that is, a regime of perception conceived vertically (inherited through family lines) rather than related to an inherent phenotypical attribute (121). In converging around and capitalising on the theatricalisation of gender and sex (in whichever form or configuration), drag stands for a strategy of performance that resists, suspends, or even incapacitates straightening-devices in a given time and place. It induces the awareness of the spectator to the act of spectating, foreclosing oblique assertions on and through (gendered, sexualised, racialised) bodies. While three decades of the polemic and often overly-generalised debate regarding the nature of drag as being either gender-revisionary or gender-conservative
seems to have been exhausted by now, I turn my focus to the phenomenological rather than performative workings of drag as a performance practice.

The shift of focus can be made tangible through a phenomenological attention to lip-syncing - a remarkably under-researched technique endemic to drag-practice. More than the use of mimetic devices and hyperbolised markers of gender/sex, the splitting of body and voice that occurs in lip-sync resists the neutralisation of the performance and brings to the foreground its conditions of arrival. Within this slant-wise space that opens between the body and the voice, much of the phenomenological work of drag takes place and from there much of its creative energy and appeal emanate. In comparison, the Brechtian Verfremdungseffekt is preoccupied with exposing ‘truth’ – that is to align the performance with alternative (parallel) line of perception (Brecht [1964] 2018: 125, 192, 195; see also Harris 1999: 78–79). The oblique-ness of drag occupies the out-of-line-ness or the slantwise – not as a tactic of sobering-up from a capitalist, middle-class illusion (false consciousness) and replacing it by a different one, but to become what Ahmed terms a ‘disorientation device’ (172). By this, Ahmed describes a quality of an action that rather than ‘correct[s] a misconception, […][it] does not overcome the "disalignment" of the horizontal and vertical axes, [but] allow[s] the oblique to open up another angle on the world' (ibid). To exist off-line.

Of essence here is the consideration of drag as a disorientation device in light of the aforementioned dynamic of disavowal and elimination central to settler-cultures.

When describing the impact – or rather the effect – peculiar to the various performances that inspired their collected volume Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives on Where Performance Leads Queer, performance scholars Alison Campbell and Stephan Farrier follow the philosopher and affect theorist Brian Massumi in asserting that queer performance creates moments which ‘sit outside of meaning’ (Campbell and Farrier 2015: 2).21 They associate this experience with a feeling that ‘a border had been transgressed, crossed or had collapsed’ (ibid). It is this connection that I am interrogating in the kinds of performances and modes of representation which I approach as drag. Dragging Campbell and Farrier into the realm of queer phenomenology, we may say that instead of a moment out of meaning this work is concerned with ‘moments of out of line.’ Moreover, the recognition of such moments as enacting a

21 On Campbell’s use of affect theory and phenomenological approach in the study of the theatre of Sera Kane see Campbell 2005, and in developing ‘dramaturgy of affect’ in contemporary theatre making see Campbell 2011.
transgression, crossing or collapse of a border is of particular relevance in the study of Zionist settler culture in light of the dynamics by which borders are constituted and constitute subjectivities and alignments (as I have discussed above). Following the work of Campbell and Farrier, I theorise drag as a site of oblique relation with a line or multiple lines, one that intervenes with a particular mode of perception by bringing to the foreground disavowed content. What follows is a different understanding of crossing; not a transition from one side to another, but the very interaction with, questioning, or even the collapsing of a border-line, or line-as-border. Whatever the aesthetic, political, or affective results of such contact may be, the very action of border-crossing (thus configured) exposes the history of the labour that brought the border into appearance and, therefore, that which was relegated to the background as a result of this labour and is routinely (actively) dis-appeared/s.

Once bracketed as a technique of resistance to straightening-devices, it is incomplete and misleading to treat drag and dragging as pre-determinately, purely, or automatically subversive; as ultimately liberating, or exclusively as a practice of the marginalised, as contemporary studies of queer performance sometimes presuppose (Muñoz 1999; Farrier 2013, 2014; Moore 2018). Even in relation to its germane context as gay-club female impersonation, feminist critiques have marked the pejorative, misogynistic, and violent potential of drag performance (Sieg 2009; Phelan 2005; Tyler 1992). On a boarder level, performance scholar Stephen Greer cautions from ‘queer’s lack of specificity,’ contending that ‘to make the claim on queer is not inherently progressive or liberational; the advantages it brings may be deeply conditional’ (Greer 2012: 4). Dismissal of and disregard for these arguments in both contemporary theoretical-academic and public-popular discourses and environments deem these discourses partial and problematically lacking. Within the context of settler-culture and in light of settler colonial theory, the concern of the violent potential of drag’s mimetic impersonation is magnified amidst settler-projects’ creative use of representation in and for phenomenological re-alignment. As I have discussed in relation to borders and as is explored in each of my thesis sections, settler culture is as much a phenomenological project as it is a geo-political or capitalist one. As such, it often makes use of drag-like techniques in redrafting exiting lines (often previously established by its own mechanisms) to accommodate the ever-changing objectives of settlement.
I therefore maintain an ambivalent position vis-à-vis the political workings and alliances of the practices which I theorise as drag, dragging, or drag-like in a settler context, refraining from presuming the resistance to or incapacitation of border-lines as inherently progressive, counter-hegemonic, liberating, or necessarily ethical. Rather, my work in settler cultural environments repeatedly leads me to a more equivocal and aporic view of drag, where more often than not liberating-subversive practices of one subject come at the expense of another, whether directly and avowedly or indirectly and implicitly. This also poses some difficult challenges to the use of drag in gestures of decolonisation which my work closely attends to theoretically and empirically. This study thus contributes to a more challenging and complex understanding of drag as both a local and globalised practice, questioning how we understand the creativity and theatricality that is involved in colonisation, settlement, and decolonisation.

**Temporal Drag: ‘Binging from the Archive’**

My focus on drag’s phenomenology is inspired by queer performance scholar Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of ‘temporal drag’, by which she asks: ‘what happens if we […] reconsider “drag,” so central to theorising the mobility of gender identification and the visible excess that calls the gender binary into question, as a temporal phenomenon? As an excess, that is, of the signifier “history” rather than of “woman” or “man”? (2010: 62). Freeman’s ‘temporal drag’ makes space for the consideration of drag’s citationality and reenactment as operating through the reintroduction of materials and affects anachronistically or, in other words, out of line. Following her lead, scholars of queer performance such as José Esteban Muñoz and Farrier have shown how dragging vitally relies on vernacular archives and inventories, appropriating their materials and, by that, sustaining and reshaping them simultaneously (Farrier 2014; Muñoz 2009). Following culture scholars Andrew Ross and Richard Dyer and echoing culture theorist Susan Sontag (1964), Freeman argues that ‘camp is a mode of archiving’, stressing that ‘the camp effect depends not only on inverting binaries such as male/female, high/low, and so on but also on resuscitating obsolete cultural signs’ (2010: 60).

While Freeman significantly writes within the context of feminist theory and history, questioning its place within queer theory and art (chiefly looking at lesbian cinema), deploying her work in the context of settler culture calls for the consideration of drag’s temporality in
tandem with its spatial and ideological significations (indeed its ‘orientation’; asking which direction it faces). As settler colonialism operates on transforming landscapes and subjectivities through future-oriented utopianism (Veracini 2010: 78), its work on temporality is fully entangled in spatiality, where landscape and history are continually worked-out to echo, reaffirm and, after archaeologist Nick Shepherd (2015), ‘mirror’ each other. This spatiotemporal productive continuum instructs an understanding of archives (as practices and institutes) as well as of the Archive (as a discursive construction of critical theory), as taking place both in and outdoors, on individual as well as on collective bodies, on buildings and landscapes. If, as Freeman suggests, drag is an action that takes place in relation to, or rather between, an archive and a present-time, then drag can take place in and in relation to each of these spaces. This distinction, therefore, constitutes archives as a pivotal point of convergence of drag and settler colonialism. A central research assumption, which I explore in depth in Part II, is that the phenomenological work of settler-colonialism in orienting landscapes and bodies in certain directions and not others generates depositories of objects, testimonies, and relics; that is, archives. Phenomenologically, we can describe these archives as the inventories of that which is relegated to the background, where it is out of sight to everyday settler culture. The access to archives and the agency to appropriate their contents and re-present them into perception is therefore imperative to both the phenomenology of settler-culture and to practices attempting its decolonisation. Theatre and performance scholar Rebecca Schneider’s widely cited work on reenactment also relies on Freeman, in framing reenactment as capitalising on ‘theatricality of time’ (Schneider 2011: 6), or ‘queer time’ (18), arguing that ‘despite or perhaps because of the error-ridden mayhem of trying to touch the past, something other than the discrete “now” of everyday life can be said to occasionally occur – or recur’ (14). Muñoz makes a similar claim, where in building on the utopianist philosopher Ernest Bloch he theorises queer performance (‘glamour and astonishment’) as ‘a kind of transport or reprieve from […] “darkness of the lived instant” ’ (Muñoz 2009: 5), or in another place ‘the devastating logic of the world of the here and now’ (12).

As Schneider’s research is located in its entirety in US culture, I read her work as one that in fact studies settler-colonialism and, moreover – settlers and settler-culture. While most of her examples of collective forgetfulness and lack of memory relate to indigenous histories and subjects (Schneider 2011: 23-4), Schneider reads them as part of an ‘impulse to modern nationhood’ rather than the very attributes of the structure of settler-culture and its role in
advancing settler-colonial processes. For example, the settler tendency to imagine a *Terra Nullius*, discussed in length in comparative studies by Wolfe and Veracini, is marked by Schneider when she writes: ‘the notion of America as youthful and innocent is basic to its mythic placeholder as “new,” “live,” and “now” – and it’s no mistake that the romantic ideas behind this came directly upon the heels of the genocide of the Indians’ (24). However, when in following settler-colonial theory we perceive nationalism to be a ‘scrim obscuring’ (to reuse Schneider’s own metaphor) of settler-colonial relations and structures, then studying settler-culture as national-culture or as an aspect of nation-building risks the compliance with the naturalisation of long-term settler-colonial processes. It leads to the constitution of settlers as normative citizens of *the* nation, with a selective memory-culture, rather than subjects that are constituted by and implicated in an ongoing process of settlement, disavowal and elimination. This inherently ideological difficulty in Schneider’s work traces back to her theoretical reliance on Freeman’s predication of temporal-drag on the concept of the ‘time-lag’ proposed by postcolonial literary scholar Homi Bhabha in his theorisation of the nation within modernity; himself based on the writings of psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon (Bhabha 1994: 340–41). This scholarly lineage (line) faces us again with the inadequacy of the postcolonial tradition to inform the study of settler-realities and the significant existing gap in theory that it marks. Postcolonial culture studies (or studies of performance as culture) which fundamentally rely on Bhabha’s empire-oriented scholarship place the colonial encounter in an imperial past and orients the (postcolonial) nation as the prime unit of analysis, rather than the very discourse that disavows contemporary on-going settler-colonialism. My work attempts to fill this gap by reorienting studies such as Schneider’s, considering reenactment as drag - a mechanism that suspends straightening devices (disavowal) of settler-colonial reality.
By positioning Tilda Death at the methodological centre of this project, I work on the intersection point of three contingent but separate and different epistemological frameworks, which I find challenging to separate out completely. As an extension of myself and as a means through which I act and exist in the world in parallel to my historically and socially constructed self, Tilda marks the zero point of my orientation; the coordinates from which my investigation unfolds. As such, this project is a phenomenological exercise, an attempt to make sense of the positions of bodies in space, and first, that of my own. Each of the following chapters is an attempt to critically articulate a specific position in the world - that of a settler subject in contemporary Israel-Palestine, retracing the conditions of the arrival of this position as an orientation of a body in space. This trajectory is highly informed by the scholarly work of both Sara Ahmed, and that of queer and trans studies scholar Jack Halberstam (2011, 1998), who both deploy critical theory to make sense of the body in space and, simultaneously, the body in space becomes the means of theorisation and hermeneutics.

The use of my biography and experiences in the world as a primary and often associative and somatic input in my study aligns it with the practice of autoethnography, in which ‘the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns’ (Spry 2001: 711). The feminist research tradition of autoethnography emphasises the recognition, interrogation, and contextualisation of the residues of culture that are inscribed on the self (Jones and Harris 2018; Jones et al. 2015; Adams et al. 2015). Therefore, in my study of settler culture, the prototype-settler I explore is myself. My core research field is the concentric circles of belonging and heritage to which I belong, and through which I become intelligible in the world to myself and others. Following that, being born to two families of kibbutz founders and growing up in a kibbutz are the primary reasons for the significant investment of this research in the site of the kibbutz as an object of study.

Kibbutz (plural: kibbutzim) are collectively-organised rural socialist communities in Israel. The Jewish Agency defines kibbutz as ‘a revolutionary idea of a voluntary society in which people live by a specific social contract, based on egalitarian and communal principles in a social and economic framework” (The Jewish Agency Website: ‘What Exactly is Kibbutz’). The wider significance of this intervention is predicated on the recurring claim that it was the
The ebbing of the kibbutz and its decline in dominance and visibility (both as a national ethos and as a real political power in the Israeli public sphere) during the last three decades can be seen as an acute expression of a self-evading mechanism of settler-colonialism (Coulthard 2014; Veracini 2010). Its iconic power as the very image of settlement is relegated to the background, while the settler-colonial process of symbolic, cultural, and physical elimination of Palestinians takes place on all levels of life, whether on the West Bank or otherwise. The very disconnect between the two political movements – that of the contemporary right-wing settlers and that of the historical kibbutz centre-left pioneers – exemplifies the way settler-colonial regimes persevere and endure, through modification, over decades. A central contention of this work is that per the adjustment of settler-colonial objectives settler-colonial disavowal turned the kibbutz into an oblique icon and an even more oblique reality. Its common perception as obsolete is therefore conspicuous in the light of settler-colonial theory, especially within its application of the study of the culture of settlers. Studying the kibbutz as the prototype of Zionist settler-colonialism, indeed its primary model is therefore accorded the phenomenological approach of retracing conditions of arrival.

Making performance and performing is my most immediate and intimate mode of action and experience, of asking questions, testing assumptions, and gaining new tacit as well as empirical knowledge. Placed within the discipline of performance studies, and continuously returning to the question of decolonisation through performance, this study utilises the event of the performance, the experience of the performer, and the creative processes of making it as means to engage with research questions. Due to the orientation of this research as outlined in the previous two sections of this chapter, the use of performance here does not necessarily inform the study of performance. As such, it cannot wholly be attributed to the developing traditions of Performance as Research or Practice-Based Research (Arlander et al. 2017; Nelson 2013; May 2015). However, it does critically utilise performing as research, where I saw the opportunity of performance and performance-making as instruments in the phenomenological-

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22 Today a total of 270 kibbutzim (plural of “kibbutz”) are found with a population of about 140,000, less than 2 percent of the total population of Israel. The size of kibbutzim varies from small kibbutzim with less than 100 members to larger ones with about 800 members and a total population of more than 1,200 inhabitants (Website of the Institution for the Research of the Kibbutz and the Cooperative Idea in the University of Haifa. Accessed: 13.07.16).
autoethnographic study of Zionist settler-culture. To the extent that experimentations with performance are theorised in this thesis as gestures of decolonisation, the research does work to inform performance practice and theory and provides a much-needed framework to theorise performance as settler-colonial or settler-decolonising in Israel-Palestine.

While it may not be apparent in the structure of the thesis, the development of this research was far from linear. In the last three and a half years I have developed multiple trajectories of inquiry which informed, refined, and reshaped my central research questions, while different methodological approaches introduced themselves as relevant and potent over others. Conversations with people on theoretical aspects of the topics of inquiry led to performance-making and ethnographic observations which, in turn, surfaced new areas of study and required new theorisation. The following chapters are, therefore, the accumulation of relevant conceptual and empirical findings of my study of settler culture and the phenomenological workings of drag in it. Accordingly, a wide range of theory and at times seemingly disparate disciplines are integrated to attend to the particular challenges presented by each of the chapters. In this, the work’s methodological tendencies echo what performance scholar Stephan Greer has termed after Halberstam a ‘queer scavenger methodology’, deployed by him in the study of exceptionality in solo queer performance (Greer 2019). I adopt his justification for methodological and theoretical heterogeneity in ‘attempt[s]’ to “collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour”’ (Halberstam in Greer 2019: 11). The study of disavowal of both indigenous subjects and of colonialism itself within such a totalising project as settler colonialism - one that recruits for its own ends culture, economics, theory, and topography indiscriminately - further enhances the need for multiheaded and diversified set of methodologies.

The first part of the thesis, titled Settler-Colonialism and Performance, begins with an inquiry into the kibbutz as history and discourse and is based on the literature of kibbutz historiography and research. This chapter contextualises this thesis as a decolonising intervention in the scholarly discourse of the kibbutz while establishing this discourse as the (disavowed) phenomenological background of contemporary Zionist settler-colonialism. The following chapter turns to the interrogation of three cases of racial and ethnic mimicry which I explore through revisiting performance studies scholar Katrin Sieg’s notion of ‘ethnic-drag’ (2009).
The final chapter of this section is a reflection on my drag performance as experimenting with the resistance to settler-colonial straightening deceives within the context of Zionist memory culture of the Holocaust. The second part is titled Settler-Colonialism and Archive and is concerned with the relationships between the settler archive and performance. The first chapter of this section presents a theorisation of the peculiarity of the ‘settler-archive’ as differing from the more commonly studied imperial or state archives. The following chapter is titled ‘Landscape Drag’, proposing the use of materials from kibbutz-archives in the suspension of settler straightening devices of landscape and the exposure of settler-colonial underlying structures. The last chapter continues the work of the previous one, in reflecting on an immersive archive-based performance in a Tel-Aviv museum, theorising it as ‘architecture-drag’. I conclude this thesis with an epilogue which provides a concise historicisation and contextualisation of the contemporary drag scene in Tel-Aviv, arguing for its unique decolonising potential.
PART I

SETTLER COLONIALISM AND PERFORMANCE
1. SETTLER-DECOLONISING KIBBUTZ RESEARCH

Socialism as a Straightening Device

Introduction

While the kibbutz is often mentioned in scholarship of settler colonialism on Israel-Palestine, it is rather remarkable that throughout the plenitude of attempts to study and theorise the kibbutz academically, intellectually, or discursively there are little to no examples to be found which utilise this framework; one that considers the kibbutz as a dogma of colonialism, comparable with other colonial localities. Colonisation (Hityashvut in Hebrew) in kibbutz-related research is addressed through non-reflexive perpetuation of settler myths, if not relegated to the background altogether. Historical research of the kibbutz highlights its instrumentality in the establishment of the State of Israel and in Israeli nation-building (Libman 2012). This view is immediately problematised when considered through the framework of settler-colonialism in which nationalism is understood as part of a settler discourse rather than an end-goal or an effective portrayal of material power relations. In its apparent disregard of indigenous Palestinian presence and Palestinian agency, kibbutz-studies in fact forms yet another mechanism of settler colonialism, that of obfuscation of the colonial situation and the underlying intention to cover its own traces. Therefore, the following chapter which primarily serves to contextualise my theorisation of performances of ethnic drag and archive in Zionist settler culture, both in kibbutzim and beyond them, may additionally be considered a gesture of undoing settler-disavowal in settler-decolonising kibbutz-studies.

The first part of the chapter presents a reorientation of early kibbutz history. I approach it as a phenomenological exercise in investigating the conditions of the arrival of the kibbutz as a political reality, as a cultural space, and as a discourse; that is, as the set of lines that orientated it and its perception. The origins of the kibbutz as well as its development and, less obviously, its present political reality and symbolic meanings, are routed in the conflation of two influential movements of modern Europe: colonialism and socialism. As implicitly evident in the works of kibbutz historian Henry Near (Near [1992] 2007) and historian of socialism Geoffrey Wigoder (Wigoder 1994), it was colonialism that consistently overshadowed and overpowered socialism in the chronology of the establishment and consolidation of agrarian
communal collectives in Ottoman and British Mandate Palestine, during the first decades of the twentieth century. In focussing on a particular historical moment in the first decade of that century, I will reframe the relationships between the two ideological tropes as fundamentally settler-colonial, by which socialism is established as a straightening-device for colonisation. Unlike the ideology and discourse of nationalism which disguise colonial violence as resulting from a national conflict, socialism is much harder to reconcile with the ethical ramifications of colonial settlement. However, the vast majority of kibbutz-related research to date traditionally treats, interrogates, and constitutes the kibbutz primarily as a form of ‘attempted socialism’ rather than one of attempted colonialism. It is my assertion that in the light of their colonial legacy and context, the analysis and theorisation of cultural forms that developed in the kibbutz throughout its century of existence must first acknowledge the use of the discourse and practice of socialism at the expense of colonialism. This dynamic is positioned here as a prototype of the settler tendency to yoke progressive ideologies in order to mask, obfuscate, and lubricate colonial violence in the Zionist context. The avoidance of this perspective results in a partial and decontextualised portrayal of the realities of the kibbutz, turning kibbutz related research into ‘kibbutz-studies’, a settler-colonial discipline of disavowal in itself. The second part of this chapter therefore surveys the consolidation of the discipline of kibbutz studies, highlighting its key areas of interest and covert ideological assumptions.

Socialist Colonialism or Colonial Socialism

‘We need pioneers, not immigrants.’
(Y. Tabenkin; cited in Near, 147)

This quote which seems to refine the settler-colonial impulse is taken from a speech of an iconic kibbutz leader, Yitzhak Tabenkin, and included in the extensive historiography of the historian Henry Near, endorsed by the kibbutz moment as its seminal historian. Near has compiled the most thorough and accessible (English) history of the kibbutz in his two-volume publication *Kibbutz: A History* on which I have relied in the following analysis (Volume I

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Near’s work mainly focuses on the early political and economic history of the kibbutz movement and dedicates much of his study to the period that preceded the Second World War. In reviewing his work, I am interested in marking the economies of disavowal that take place between the phenomenological front and background of a text that is said to unfold the kibbutz history the way the kibbutz is telling it to itself.

While most Eastern European Jewish immigrants during the last decades of the nineteenth century made the journey to Western Europe and North and Latin America, much smaller groups made their way to Palestine. These were organised and supported by several loosely related philanthropic societies such as Hovevei Zion, the Baron Rothschild, and The Jewish Colonisation Association (JCA) (Near 2007). Utopian ideas of establishing a new society with exemplary equality and social justice were already prevalent in the first Jewish colonies (Moshavot) that had been established since the early 1880s in Palestine. Several short-lived experiments in social organisation, such as co-operatives of artisans and communal cultivation of lands, were attempted by their settlers (10). However, it was only in 1904 and onwards that the ideas and practices of Social Zionism began to take root, when a second wave of immigrants settled in Palestine. These established the first Kvutzot - Degania and Kineret - in 1909, located in the northern province of Galilée, distant and isolated from the concentration of non-collectivist moshavot, which were largely centred along the coastline. Near highlights the discord between the new immigrants and the veteran settlers of the moshavot as the main motivation for the establishment of the first collectives that would later turn into kvutzot (14-

24 A Hebrew translation of this work was published in an abbreviated version in 2008. Nonetheless, Near’s academic work is regarded within the kibbutz movement as the ‘official’ history of the kibbutz, and him as its official historian (see Azati, 2011).
25 The first volume carefully outlines the events of the first three decades of the kibbutz (1910-1939) and ends with the eve of the Second World War. In comparison, the second volume covers nearly six decades in which such pivotal events in kibbutz history such the war of 1948, the change of government in 1977 and the economic crisis and privatisation that followed are reviewed in a notably less detailed fashion (on further critique of Near’s project see Warhurst, 1999).
26 These groups of immigrants are known in Zionist and kibbutz historiography as the First ‘Aliya’ (Hebrew for ascending; retrospectively coined ‘first’ by default of those who arrived some twenty-two years later and who anointed themselves ‘Second Aliya’ in order to distinguish themselves from the former, while maintaining a continuum of Zionist presence in Palestine; Wolfe, 2012:141). The Palestinian Jewish community at the time of their arrival numbered about 24,000 people (Wigoder, 1994,Vol. 1:48). The extent of the First Aliya is estimated by Wigoder to be 30,000 to 40,000 people, mainly from Eastern Europe and a group of about 5000 Yemenite Jews (49).
27 According to Wigoder this group, the Second Aliya, numbered between 35,000 to 40,000 people (Near mentions no more than 30,000) to have arrived in Palestine between 1904 to 1914. Wigoder claims that the Jewish population in Palestine at the eve of the First World War numbered 90,000 people (Vol1:49).
28 Kvutzot (Heb. Group) Initially functioned as a temporary collective aimed at the training of people and preparation of land for permanent agricultural settlements. Kibbutz was a later model, different from the exclusionary and intimate Kvutzot, it aspired to expand both demographically and geographically. Because of economic and political pressures in the 1930s Deganya, Kineret and other Kvutzot turned into Kibbutzim. Kvutzot served as the ideological, spiritual and organisational model for the large Kibbutz Movement to come (Near, 14-15).
15). This pivotal conflict ensued mainly over the reluctance of the more established settlers to prioritise the employment of Jewish workers (mostly inexperienced in agricultural labour) over Palestinian workers (Shafir 1996). Therefore, the beginning of a kibbutz priding itself for ‘Jewish labour’ is part and parcel of the origins of ethnic segregation, racialisation, and discrimination in Israel-Palestine.

Socialist Jews in Palestine perceived Zionism to be a fortunate opportunity for the fulfilment of their utopian socialism no less than they perceived socialism to be a pragmatic method for Zionist colonialism. Their inclination towards socialist doctrines was not arbitrary. Near relates it to the direct influence of the intellectual and political atmosphere in which their politics and identities had been shaped. Largely growing up in Russian-Jewish middle-class homes, these young men and women were exposed to an exceptionally wide range of schools of Judaism: from zealous orthodoxy to absolute emancipation and assimilation. They were also exposed to different forms and expressions of Zionism. Outside (or, often, alongside) the confines of the Jewish communities, fin-de-siècle Russia was abounding with revolutionary ideologies ranging from ‘populism, Tolstoyan thought, Anarchism - both Nihilism and Kropotkin’s communalism, Bolshevik social democracy […], and liberalism’ (15). In Near’s words, all these formed an ‘intellectual ambience in which the concept of revolution, or the building of a new society purged of the evils they saw around them, was a generally accepted idea’ (ibid).

Economist of Zionism Harry Viteles notes that many of the influential early leaders of Social Zionism found their way to Palestine because of the failure of the 1905 communist revolution in Russia (Viteles 1968: 5). This characteristic of a revolutionary, influential minority would remain a central attribute of the kibbutz movement throughout its history. As can be expected from revolutionary groups who are exclusivist because of the high ideological and moral demands they place on their members, this group was and is starkly small as well. This was the

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29 Also known in its Russian Narodnism or Narodnichestvo (New World Encyclopaedia.com), Populism is known for its ideology of ‘going to the people’ which particularly inspired the conviction that the creation of a Jewish working class could not be achieved ‘in any other way than them themselves, the sons and daughters of Jews who had been divorced from productive work for many generations, should become workers […] (and) agricultural labourers’ (Near,15). The ‘should become’ in Near’s text, expresses the placement of the corporal-performative over the discursive-symbolic. This parallels my contextualisation of bodily practices such as ‘Africa Day’ (see next chapter) and the particular engagement with race and racialisation offered by them. In this regard, the Populist movement and its ideals may offer a genealogical source of, or influence on performances of ethnic drag in Zionist settler culture.

30 These include influential figures such as Manya Shoat and Joseph Trumpeldor, who perceived their Zionism as a direct continuation of their revolutionary activism in Russia. The realisation that ‘the only way of settling the country was by the establishment of collective colonies’ (Near 24) is attributed to them. Furthermore, the two were seminal in the establishment of the first two Zionist armed collectives HaShomer (Shoat) and HaIrgun (Trumpeldor), established in order to protect the colonies and soon became colonising organisations in their own right (Near, 47,57).
case in relation to the Jewish population in Palestine, its overall population notwithstanding, and even within the group of second-wave immigrants. Out of the (approximately) 30,000 Jewish immigrants who arrived in Palestine after 1904, only 2,500 belonged to organised Social Zionism groups in 1914 (12). Despite its size, by this time this minority had already assumed the role of a leading elite group that laid ‘the ideological and structural foundations for the State of Israel’ (11).

As emerges from Near’s work, the main reason for this anomaly is rooted in the favouring of the leadership of the Zionist Movement (WZO) of the socialist style of settlements. Led by Theodor Hertzl since its official consolidation in the first Zionist Congress (Basel 1897), the movement officially objected to the partisan settlement of Jews in Palestine and largely withdrew any support for the moshavot. It was Hertzl's fervent contention that an official juridical framework for a Zionist presence in Palestine must be obtained from the Ottoman government prior to any actual settlement (Near 9, 22). The financial hardships faced by the moshavot and their dependence on the philanthropists who established them served to prove their strategic and ideological failure in the campaign to found a national-political Jewish entity in Palestine, the Zionist Movement’s main and most persistently pursued goal. However, 1907 saw a shift in this policy when, in response to the plea of representatives of Social Zionism, Arthur Ruppin, the head of the Colonisation Department in the Zionist Movement, was sent to Palestine in order to mobilise resources and promote land acquisitions to establish training farms for future settlements. Groups of trainees stayed in some of the farms which were turned later into permanent kvutzot, while others established new ones in other locations (22-3). Following that, the Zionist Movement officially adopted the patent of collectivist agrarian communes. By the end of the First World War the Zionist Movement began to perceive the kvuta ‘as the most practical and efficient instrument for the attainment of its (newly-defined) declared aims: settlement, absorption of new immigrants and the creation of modern Jewish culture’ (Near 55). An implicit contract characterised the relationship of

31 Near states that some sources, such as Even Shushan (1962) quote even smaller numbers - 1,500-1,600 (Near 12).
32 A qualification should be made here regarding the multiple and at a certain time influential ideological strands within Zionism which objected to the colonisation of Palestine or colonialism as an approach of modern Jewish self-determination. These became marginalised through the first half of the twentieth century and many of their thinkers, political leaders and advocates were murdered in the Nazi genocide of the Holocaust. For a recent study of non-settling approaches in Zionist thought see Shumsky 2018.
33 An historical paradigm-shift at the backdrop of this policy change by Zionist Movement was the war’s aftermath, in which the Ottoman charter was no longer relevant and the prospects of British sympathy with the Zionist cause were made ever so convincing by the release of the Balfour Declaration in November 1917.
Zionist Socialism and the general Zionist Movement thereafter: ‘the kvutza acted as the agent of Zionism, and in return was allowed to conduct its ‘social experiments’ without undue interference’ (ibid; emphasis in the original). The socialism of Social Zionism was made possible because it offered the Zionist Movement the strategy and means to become a movement of colonial settlement.

In turn, Social Zionism was to compromise socialism wherever it interfered with settlement. It was this compromise that led to the model of the kibbutz as it crystallised over time. The earliest, and perhaps most fateful compromise took place in near correlation with and partially as an outcome of a policy shift of the Zionist movement after the First World War. The war’s aftermath, the Balfour Declaration in November 1917, and the success of the (second) Communist Revolution in Russia motivated a third wave of immigration almost entirely composed of young people who intended to join Social Zionism (39,000 between 1918 and 1923). The kvuztot, which were established as small and exclusive élite groups, were neither capable nor generally interested in absorbing these newcomers. The solution was found in a shift of strategy from a ‘kvutza model’ of settlement, which favoured elitist selectivity and intimacy, to a model of the ‘large kvutza’, and later ‘kibbutz’, which prioritised demographic growth and colonisation over principles of socialist utopianism. By 1921 this new model led to the establishment of Ein Harod and Tel Yosef, the first settlements in the prototype of the kibbutz in the Yizrael Valley, south of the Galilee. A small minority of kvutzot-veterans maintained a fierce opposition to this move but by the end of the 1930s all kvutzot had turned into kibbutzim (Near 97-111). From this point onwards, the kibbutz project invested ever-growing resources and creativity in settling and cultivating new land, while the zealous commitment to socialist utopia gradually waned.

Following the faithful shift from exclusionary kvutza to inclusive kibbutz model, the kibbutz movement required new manpower for the establishment of new kibbutzim as well as to support existing ones, which were continuously deserted by a large percentage of their members. This manpower was provided through the establishment and operation of numerous Zionist youth movements throughout the main Jewish centres of Eastern and later Western Europe (mainly Germany).34 Training farms were established by these youth organisations in

34 This development should be seen as part of the booming of youth movements in Europe of the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the first half of the twentieth century. As a result of the development in leisure culture in middle class of industrialised cities in Western Europe, ‘groups of high school students began to participate in spare-time activities
different European countries, where growing numbers of Jewish youths would undergo training during the summertime and then migrate to Palestine, determined to join a kibbutz. Even though they were no longer in wide practice, the ideals and myths of the first kvutzot (namely Deganya and Kineret) were disseminated and propagated by the Zionist youth movements in order to inspire and motivate tens of thousands of youngsters (mostly aged between 18 and 24) to immigrate (Near 99). By 1930 the two biggest youth organisations numbered together approximately 55,000 registered members (122).

These two momentous developments in the early history of the kibbutz movement – the exclusionary insistence on Jewish labour and the transformation of the ideological socialist communes into the colonising mechanism of the kibbutz with its international network of youth movements – clearly align Social Zionism with the dynamics of settler colonialism, as articulated by the principles of the settler-colonial paradigm outlined above. As the Moshavot of the First Aliya were relying on Palestinian labour, they resembled the paradigm of classic colonialism, though they did not manage to export revenue to a metropolis and could hardly sustain themselves. However potentially exploitative, this reality was imbricated in a continuous relationships with and co-dependency of Palestinians and in some respect was in tandem with the social-economic norms and structures of quasi-feudal late Ottoman empire (Near 14-15). For example, the first language spoken by my maternal grandfather who grew up in a moshava was Arabic, as his nanny and her family lived with his family, whose Russian-origin members were all fluent Arabic speakers. The kibbutz model on the other hand rejected Palestinian indigenous labour and focused on acquiring more land and establishing ethnically segregated settlements on it. As will be explored in Part II of this thesis, in the reality of the early kibbutz, Arabic, if spoken at all, was mastered mainly by individuals who specialised in the collection of intelligence (Sabbagh-Khoury 2014). Historian Gershon Shafir recognises these policies of ‘conquest of labour’ as the leading constituent of the modalities by which the
violence in Israel-Palestine is conceived of in terms of Jewish-Arab or Israel Palestinian conflict:

Though myths are usually related to origins, here ideological thinking preceded the construction of myths but is also closely linked with it. The ideological denial of a conflict between Jewish settler-immigrants and the Arabs of Palestine over markets of labour at the very least hindered the conflict's resolution and more likely contributed to its escalation and transformation into a full-scale military confrontation, which then became fertile ground for the birth of the Israeli-Arab mythologies (2006 xiii).

By September 1939 there were 79 kibbutzim in Palestine (Near, 155). This process gradually led to the violence of 1948 where 70% of the Palestinian population was evacuated or killed and in which the kibbutz (its leaders, property and organisational infrastructure) played a seminal role (Morris, 1989). It was during the years of 1948-49 that the vast majority of new kibbutzim were established. While obfuscating its colonial nature, this process continues to this day in the confiscation of Palestinian lands (presently throughout the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the southern region of the Negev), the under-development of Palestinian towns and villages inside Israel proper and the military oppression of the West Bank and Gaza. In a recent television documentary, a leader of the right-wing settler movement in the West Bank, Ariye Eldar, enthusiastically quoted the ideological publications of Kibbutz Hanita from the 1950s in order to legitimate his discourse of colonisation and occupation (Kahlili 2016). Eldar indicated the contingencies and similarities between his ideological discourse and that of the historical kibbutz movement. By foregrounding a disavowed continuation between the secular, liberal, economically left-leaning settlement of the kibbutz to that of the religious, right-wing settlements in the West-Bank, Eldar brought into view the settler-colonial process that precedes as well as exceeds national, ideological, or sectorial categories. Neoliberal Israel today does not seem to bear any sign of its kibbutz socialist legacy (not even in the kibbutzim). The claim for the kibbutz’s influential contribution to contemporary Israel holds true only in the ideology, discourse, and mechanism of settler colonialism that were defined and mastered by it during the first half of the twentieth century.
Kibbutz Historiography and its Decolonisation

By large, contemporary historiography of the kibbutz focuses on a starkly narrow and traditional range of national and military historical frameworks. One example is the work of kibbutz historian Tal Elmaliach who studies the ways by which the tensions of political engagement and commitment to the Zionist national cause have influenced the kibbutz and its political parties in the post-1948 State of Israel (Elmaliach 2014). These trajectories of a new generation of kibbutz historians continue the historiographic projects of scholars such as Near. Although representing different generations, Near and Elmaliach both uncritically confine their historiography to Zionist-Israeli perspectives, where critical engagement with the kibbutz as a western-colonial agent in Palestine and as a unique form of settler-colonialism are absent. Where cultural history of the kibbutz is concerned, the evidence for critical scholarly activity is even scarcer. An exception to this rule in fact comes from a member of the older generation of scholars, in the voluminous publication by the American economist Harry Viteles: A History of the Co-operative Movement in Israel, A Source Book in 7 Volumes. Published between 1966 and 1968, this extensive collection of documents contextualises the kibbutz within a wide network of pre-state and national cooperatives, amongst which the kibbutz is but one (however privileged) element out of several others. One of the chapters is dedicated to the study of the Arab Co-Operative movement (Vol. 1:169-81). However brief, this inclusion goes against the grain of Zionist kibbutz historiography and, more significantly, against the logic of settler colonialism in its elimination (consciously, symbolically and physically) of the indigenous and its conception of the kibbutz as an isolated, ideal utopia.

A much further-reaching intervention is offered by the culture studies scholar Lior Libman who theorises the crisis of the kibbutz movement upon the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 through the work of the historian Dominick LaCapra on historiography and trauma (Libman, 2012). Libman examines the events of 1948 as a breaking point in which the inherent contradiction between Zionism and socialism could no longer be repressed (27). She recounts the complicity of the kibbutz in the Palestinian Nakbah as one out of three causes (and signifiers) of this shattering trauma, after which the kibbutz as movement would never fully recover (57-62). Libman’s work represents a commendable intervention in the accepted

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37 Another such notable exception to the rule is the historical study of Amir Goldstein (2016) on the relationship of kibbutz members in the upper galilee and the Mizrahi immigrants in Kiryat Shemona transit-camp during the 1950s.
research norms of kibbutz research on the violence of 1948, which is generally limited to questions of the kibbutz’s role in Israeli nation-building (as in Near, Gelber, and Elmaliach for example). Furthermore, her project uniquely provides an engagement with the crisis of the kibbutz in 1948 from the perspective of culture studies and, in contrast to previous research, assumes a critical position vis-à-vis the kibbutz’s internal epistemology (37). Libman regards the settlement of kibbutzim on Palestinian lands which were emptied of their inhabitants during 1948 as a fatal act of self-destruction, a death blow that ‘not only did not fulfil its utopian idea but effectively destroyed and terminated it’ (62). As part of her evidence, Libman cites different post-1948 internal kibbutz publications lamenting the expulsion of neighbouring Palestinian villages and upon encountering objects left behind by refugees (59-60). However traumatic (Libman’s term) this experience can and must have been for settler communities and individuals, it does not mark the end - nor the beginning, as we saw - of kibbutz settler colonialism. As partially suggested by her, trauma may become an ethos that amends those humanist values damaged, while dispossession, elimination of the indigenous and disavowal of the colonial reality all persist and intensify (see my discussion of perpetrator’s trauma in Chapter 5). Libman’s important development marks a significant movement towards the analysis and theorisation of the kibbutz as a peculiar compromise amidst the inherent paradoxes of settler-colonial reality, breaking away from totalising nationalist discourses. It also highlights the potential of culture studies and cultural history to fill in the gaps and blind spots of the major traditions of political and national histories. It is in relation to and in the alignment of such gestures within the corpus of kibbutz-related research that this study of settler-culture stands.

In the second part of this chapter I explore how this foundational bias of ‘doing colonisation while seeing and speaking socialism’ informed and shaped the traditions of academic study of the kibbutz. As demonstrated, Zionist historiography of the conflict between the settlers of the Moshavot and Social Zionism in the 1910s widely elaborates the conflict of ideologies (capitalism’s private ownership versus socialism’s collectivism) over waged labour and by large undermines the colonial-racist aspects of the demands for ‘Jewish’ or ‘Hebrew’ labour (Avoda Ivrit in Hebrew). Along similar lines, the majority of the organised research on the kibbutz in the humanities since its advent in the 1950s and onwards places the tension between the kibbutz’s socialist relationships and its capitalist surroundings at the centre of its analysis. Within the discourse it reproduces, the endurance of the kibbutz as a socialist form in spite of this inherent tension often serves as an indication of the kibbutz’s success. Accordingly, the
consideration of the function of the kibbutz as a colonising mechanism and its utility (or, in later years, the lack thereof) for the Zionist settlement project as the potential factor for either its endurance or demise is largely overlooked by researchers.

Kibbutz-Studies as Discipline

‘A signal non-failure’
(M. Buber, Paths in Utopia, 1949:142)

The philosopher Michel Foucault shaped the study of disciplines as a modality of power and its consolidation, and I follow his lines of enquiry in my examination of ‘kibbutz-studies’ as a discipline (Foucault [1977] 1995: 137, 177). While a thorough Foucauldian-genealogical investigation of it is beyond the scope of this research, in the following I do wish to point out certain discursive characteristics that align kibbutz studies with settler-colonial dynamic, as a mechanism of both accumulation and disavowal. The use of the term 'kibbutz studies' for the scholarly activity that developed through academic research of the kibbutz is used mainly by kibbutz-member scholars for whom kibbutz ideologies, economies, and social realities serve as the focal point of their research (recent influential examples are (Palgi and Reinharz 2011; Shapira 2015; Leviatan 2003; Rosner 2000). These kibbutznik-researchers mainly work in and through the Institute for the Research of the Kibbutz and the Cooperative Idea in the University of Haifa.38 The establishment of the latter in 1976 seem to have consolidated this research field and centralised what before was diverse branches of research that took place within the general disciplines of social sciences and the humanities. No longer a case study, the kibbutz became the body of knowledge, the discipline itself.

The characteristics of such unorthodox scholarly grouping such as kibbutz studies – one which is from one hand not aligned with a specific set of methodologies (or scholarly disciplines) and, on the other hand, invested in highly localised sites – echoes the disciplinary nature of academic division of Area Studies (such as American Studies, African Studies, South-Asian Studies etc.) In his seminal text Orientalism (1978) literary scholar Edward Said criticises the epistemological reasoning behind scholarly fields that target a geographical or ethnic

38 As evident from early publications of the institute, its first English name was The Institute for Kibbutz Studies.
For Said, the end goal of the study of the Orient is to dominate it (and its inhabitants) through the production of the knowledge ‘of’ the Orient; i.e. containing it discursively by means of articulating it. Historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson notes in a similar vein that ‘the rise of area studies in the post-war United States directly reflected the country’s new hegemonic position [in the world]’, and particularly its political interest in south-east Asia (2016: 34). Anderson further reaffirms Said’s analysis of the disciplinary workings of area studies, when describing the establishment of new university departments of area studies in the 1950s US as largely funded and encouraged by state agencies, directly evolving from scholarly traditions of colonial bureaucrats (36). In the case of kibbutz studies, however, the situation appears to be an inverse one, considering the contribution of kibbutz members to the discipline of kibbutz studies, and the initiatives of the Kibbutz Movement itself to promote and institutionalise it. Kibbutz studies hence served to constitute the kibbutz as the conductor of study and its object at the same time. From the Kibbutz Movement’s perspective, it rather obviously appears as a profitable enterprise to yoke academic research to its own material development and improvement. Simultaneously, I suggest, the consolidation and perpetuation of the kibbutz as an object for intellectual, academic, and scholarly writing forms a significant and often overlooked means of its decontextualisation from settler-colonial reality. Kibbutz studies orientate the kibbutz phenomenologically.

Early Writings: An Experiment

Intellectual and scholarly writings about the kibbutz movement have taken place throughout its existence and in close tandem with its development. Given that the kibbutz’s very onset in the early years of the twentieth century was highly motivated by prophetic literature of both

39 Said perceived area studies to be the liberal neo-colonial incarnation of Orientalism: ‘in the universities a growing establishment of area-studies programs and institutes has made the scholarly study of the Orient a branch of national policy’ (26); ‘Area studies and Orientalism […] [are] interchangeable’ (2003: 53).
40 Together with the Institute for the Research of the Kibbutz & the Cooperative Idea in the University of Haifa, two kibbutz-owned research institutes - Yad Tabekin and Giva’at Haviva are the main hubs for kibbutz studies activities in Israel.
41 Today the kibbutz movement includes 268 settlements all throughout Israel, and few in the West Bank (Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics. Online resource; Accessed 08.12.16).
Zionist\textsuperscript{42} and socialist\textsuperscript{43} intellectuals who envisioned the establishment of socialist collectives of Jews in Palestine, the kibbutz as a subject for writing predates the kibbutz as a political reality. The following review of different strands and trends of kibbutz studies scholarship will focus primarily on English language publications.\textsuperscript{44} Although Hebrew publications on the kibbutz appeared only slightly later than those in English and German and are undoubtedly relating to and in conversation with them, Hebrew kibbutz related research appears to present different characteristics and concerns. This is mainly due to its role within intra-Israeli public and academic discourses.

Few of the earliest publications on the kibbutz emerged as a matter of philosophical, political, and economic debate, situated at the intellectual crossroads of Zionism and socialism. In 1942, for example, the German communist thinker Karl Minter published an article entitled ‘Jewish Colonisation in Palestine,’ where he argues that due to the capitalist and ‘backward’ conditions of Palestine, the kibbutz cannot be regarded as truly socialist and ‘is therefore, more accurately to be labelled collectivist’ (Minter 1942: 280). As did early thinkers of capitalism, such as the German sociologist Franz Oppenheimer (cited in Rosner 2003), Minter prophesied in this article the inevitable approaching demise of the kibbutz project. The philosopher Martin Buber assumed an opposite position. In his book \textit{Paths in Utopia} (Heb. 1945; Eng. 1949) he theorised the kibbutz as the ‘experiment that did not fail’ ([1949] 1996: 139), and later as a ‘signal non-failure’ (142). By this (later) widely quoted term, Buber celebrates twenty-five years of agrarian-communal Jewish settlement in Palestine as the most realistic implementation of communal socialism to date. Either optimistic or pessimistic regarding its fate, supportive or critical of its objectives and conduct, both Minter and Buber are united in their perception of the kibbutz as a kind of testing ground for theories of socialism. Both scholars perceive the kibbutz’s success or failure to be of consequence to a much wider network of expectations, ideologies, and worldviews than the private fates of its members.

The compliance of kibbutzim with academic research performed on their members and institutions attests perhaps to the internalisation of this image, one of a human terrarium, an

\textsuperscript{42} For example, Theodor Herzl’s futurist \textit{Altneuland} (1902) describes socialist utopias established by Jews in Palestine or the scholarship of Max Nordau (widely published during the 1880s-1890s) which propagated ideas of the New Jew and of redemption through physical labour (Murphy 2007).

\textsuperscript{43} Such as the writings of A.D Gordon.

\textsuperscript{44} The first academic symposium on the kibbutz in the US took place in 1953 (Lavi 1990: 3).
Kibbutz Studies: Institutionalising Kibbutz Research

According to the kibbutz anthropologist Reuven Shapira (2008), as of 2008 more than 5000 publications on kibbutz were catalogued in the Institute for the Research of the Kibbutz and the Cooperative Idea in the University of Haifa. The institute was founded by the kibbutz sociologist Menachem Rosner (1976), who started his academic career in the late 1950s, upon the request of the kibbutz’s high authorities. Rosner is a representative of the first generation of kibbutz member-scholars whose academic work was perceived as part of the kibbutz’s productive output. His academic work dovetailed earlier research in English, German and

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45 ‘The kibbutz is a society, indeed, in which the members are acutely aware that their task is not only their own material reproduction but also the realisation of socialism’ (Warhurst, 1999:9).

46 Organisational sociologists Christopher Warhurst contends that ‘few research sites can be as geographically distinct and contained for sociologists as the kibbutz with its working, recreational and living areas contained by a perimeter fence of barbed wire located at the end of a small access road, often in the semi-desert tens of kilometres from the nearest town’ (Warhurst, 1999:14).

47 This figure is particularly striking once recalling the relative size of the kibbutz population in relation to the overall population of Israel/Palatine - never more than 3% throughout its existence.

48 His first book The Kibbutz as a Way of Life in Modern Society: A Collection of Articles, was published in 1960.
French, mainly in Anthropology (Spiro 1956) and Education (Rábiň 1957; Rapaport 1958). During later decades, it seems that the focal point of academic interest in the kibbutz shifted from outside scholars, such as the anthropologist Melford E. Spiro and the sociologist Albert Í. Rábiň, to insiders such as Rosner and his students. During the 1980s and 1990s the sweeping majority of published studies on the kibbutz was by scholars who were themselves kibbutz members. The consolidation of a discipline therefore appears to reflect a process by which an external diverse scholarly attention and discussion gradually transformed into an inward-facing preoccupation and advocacy.

Evidently, the most thoroughly studied element of kibbutz life and its major source of attraction for the social sciences both before and after the disciplinary establishment of kibbutz studies was the communal rearing of children and the attempt to dismantle the nuclear family. Kibbutz children used to live and sleep in houses designed for each age group while their parents lived separately. Apart from one hour a day when they would spend time with their parents, kibbutz children lived, studied, played, ate, and slept in collective designated facilities. The practice known as communal child-rearing continued in most kibbutzim until the 1990s (Palgi and Reinharz 2011: 8). By 1990, some 1000 studies were published on this topic in international academic literature (Lavi 1990: 3). Social scientists such as Melford E. Spiro (1956, 1958), Albert Í. Rábiň (1957, 1965), Bruno Bettelheim ([1969] 2001) and Yonina Talmon (1974) have been studying the residential houses of kibbutz children over long periods of time. The sociologist David Rapaport explained that: ‘the upbringing of children in the agricultural collectives in Israel is for the social scientist what an ”experiment of nature” is for the natural scientist’ (1958: 587). Conducted mainly by non-kibbutz member scholars between the 1950s and 1970s, the earlier generation of studies of communal child rearing was characterised by an outsider’s position and was eager to test norms and assumptions regarding the structure of the family and its influence on children’s psychology and behaviour. For example, Rappaport provides the following observation:

As toddlers and nursery school children (boys and girls) use the same baths and lavatories, without privacy. This lack of privacy shows a spontaneous devolution; boys and girls spontaneously separate, first in the lavatories and then in the showers (1958: 587).

Attributing his findings to the kibbutz’s rejection of ‘all hypocrisy’ (ibid), Rappaport's troubling scientific-observational jargon is indicative of the objectification of kibbutz children
as exotic, and the romanticising of their ‘natural’ behaviour, undamaged by modern life in researchers of the 1950s and 1960s. Spiro deliberately chose the kibbutz as a field of anthropological study as it offered a ‘middle form’ between modernity and the people of Ifaluk he studied in Micronesia during that time (Spiro 1965: vii). In 1960s kibbutz children were used as a burgeoning currency within psychological academic debates. Educational psychologist Bruno Bettelheim studied the communal childrearing methods of the kibbutz in response to publications by Albert Í Rábíň, who found that kibbutz children did not develop into psychologically healthy adults (Rábíň 1965). Motivated by timely debates in the US academia, Bettelheim used his study of kibbutz child rearing to show that multiple kinds of parenting styles can transform children into healthy adults, criticising his opponents’ traditionally bourgeois views (1969). The kibbutz was constructed as interesting, exciting, and strange. This way the social experiment of the kibbutz – its settler-utopia – served interests, needs, and desires of western social scientists who gained easy access to what they saw as an alternative to western modernity, which at the same time, was perhaps more accessible and comprehensible for them than non-European objects of study. In turn, their gaze entirely isolated the kibbutz from its settler-colonial context. While capitalising on its social peculiarity, researchers participated in naturalising its violence as a mechanism of dispossession.

**Kibbutz Studies Today**

More recent work raises the question of the possibility of kibbutz abroad, that is, as detached from Zionist colonialism. The work of the historian Rona Yona on the vibrant kibbutzim that existed in Poland before the Holocaust (2012) problematises the paradigmatic connection of the kibbutz to practices of Jewish colonialism in Palestine. Yona’s study reveals but a hint of the complexities and ambivalences which are marginalised – relegated to the background – by traditions of kibbutz studies. Architect and sociologist Haim Yacobi studies unsuccessful Israeli attempts to export the model of the kibbutz to sub-Saharan countries such as Ghana, Ivory Coast and Zambia in the 1960s (Yacobi 2015: 35-8). However, Both Yona and Yacobi are not affiliated as kibbutz-studies scholars. Kibbutz members Yehudit Aagasi and Yoel Darom edited the volume *The Alternative Way of Life: The First International Conference on*

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49 ‘In the mid-1930s, the largest kibbutz movement in the world was […] in Poland’ (Yona, 2012:9).
As suggested by the title, this is a collection of articles that were written for an international conference organised by the kibbutz movements for members of communes abroad. A second volume was published in 1987 with contributions from participants of a conference that took place in 1985. This quasi-academic publication seems to suggest alternative-socialist lines of identification for the kibbutz, ones that will exceed the Israeli-Zionist context. However, the list of delegates in both conferences is populated solely by representatives from the US, UK and Scandinavia. Although socialist-inspired and other collectives were and are present in abundance outside the west (in places such as India, China, Latin America for example, in far greater numbers), the kibbutz’s choice of allies makes clear its preference of white western counterparts and in this once more reaffirms the prevalence of the colonial-racial consideration over the socialist one in its constitution.

While the international conferences on communal living in the 1980s may mark the height of the kibbutz as an exemplary site for and authority on well executed ‘attempted socialism’, its financial crisis and rapid material and ideological deterioration during the 1990s provided for a different kind of research. Organisational sociologists such as Christopher Warhurst (1999) and Zhacharya Sheaffer (Sheaffer at al. 2010) found the collective distress of the experiment no less revealing than its relative success in previous years. These scholars conducted ethnographic, quantitative and qualitative studies of the kibbutz institutions, factories and services in order to exercise, sustain or disqualify theories of social science such as crises intensity (Sheaffer at al.) or field theory (Warhurst).  
Even when kibbutz production and economic and social distress were in their all-time low, kibbutz studies flourished, this time theorising signal failure and disintegration rather than novelty and vision.

The department of Israeli Studies in the American University in Washington DC held a conference titled ‘The Kibbutz: Ideal, Crisis, Renewal’ in late October 2016. Interestingly, the first panel titled ‘The Rise and Fall of the Kibbutz Ideal’ was opened with a paper by the

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50 Their field of academic experts is unknown to me.
51 The kibbutz anthropologist Reuven Shapira argues in his monograph Transforming Kibbutz Research (2015) that all previous studies of the kibbutz as an organisation were misguided because in their attempts to analyse the kibbutz’s organisational hardships, they ‘ignored the upper strata that dominated the kibbutz field by heading and managing inter-kibbutz federative organisations’ (Shapira, 2015: 4). Shapira argues that when kibbutz leaders were involved in (among other things) projects of kibbutz-studies they were not studied as part of its organisational framework and were therefore able to influence the scholarship. Per Shapira, this created a gap between the literature and lived realities on the kibbutz.
Canadian author David Leach, who recently published a non-academic book named *Chasing Utopia: The Future of The Kibbutz in A Divided Israel* (2016). In a form that resembles a travel log, Leach explores the present-day reality of the kibbutz from an outsider’s perspective and contrasts it with his own idealised memories as an eighteen-year-old volunteer in a kibbutz in the upper Galilee. The text’s critical contribution to the scholarly discussion of contemporary themes and questions concerning the kibbutz notwithstanding, the choice of a non-fiction writer rather than a kibbutz researcher to launch an academic conference is revealing of the tendency of this field to slip between the academic and the non-academic, the scientific and the political, the personal and the objective, though often without acknowledging it.\footnote{Within Hebrew kibbutz-studies this is even more evident for, as mentioned above, many of the accomplished kibbutz scholars are also members of kibbutzim and are often perceived as spiritual and intellectual leaders in them (see for example writings by Muki Tzur and Dani Rozolio).}

The question that underlined Leach’s project concerned the future of the kibbutz, described by him to have originated in a left-leaning socialist dogma, and now facing a contemporary reality of neoliberal capitalism and right-wing political predominance in Israel’s public sphere. With different variations, this question and its derivatives can be said to be the preoccupation of most leading contemporary Israeli kibbutz scholars such as expressed by Rosner (2000) and by psychologist and sociologist Uriel Leiviatan (2003). It is also the overarching concern of the collection of articles *One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life* (2011), edited by the sociologists Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinhartz. A recurring theme in the research of the last fifteen years, as reflected in this collection, is the ability of the kibbutz to rejuvenate and adjust to the new realities of debt, lack of governmental support and accelerated neoliberal capitalism.

The aforementioned scholars diagnose and illustrate two major trends in their works. One is the privatisation of the clear majority of kibbutzim, following an economic crisis that befell them in the 1980s. Through this process kibbutz communities continue to exist by gradually dismantling their socialist and co-operative systems (Rosner 2000; Leiviatan 2003; Shapira 2015; Palgi and Reinhartz 2011). The other relates to recently formed collectives that define themselves as ‘urban kibbutzim’, whose members live as a commune in different cities in Israel and pursue educational activism and social change mainly within marginalised communities (Dror in Palgi and Reinhartz 2011). This relatively new form of Social Zionism (the first urban kibbutz was established in 1979; ibid: 316) offers an up-to-date outlet and aim for the traditional educational institutions of the kibbutz movement (namely, the Social-Zionist youth...
movements). Considered together, privatisation of kibbutzim albeit with the continuation of their existence on state-owned land on one hand, and the advent of non-colonising (not-land nor labour related, in settler-colonial terms) Social Zionism on the other, suggests the divorce of the two legacies of colonialism and socialism which collision is the very definition of the kibbutz, and the tension thereof is at the heart of this investigation. In this way, the colonising mission of the kibbutz persists even when there is no practical prospect to practice socialism in twenty-first century Israel-Palestine, while its settling drive perseveres in turning more and more agricultural land into private housing, and its (socialist) institutions develop new modes of activity (and income) such as the urban kibbutzim.

While both privatisation and urban kibbutzim mark the end of the kibbutz as the successful and widely celebrated Israeli settler-icon, recent studies of scholars of literature, arts, and culture indicate its persistence as a popular theme and metaphor in Israeli cultural production. Ranen Omer-Sherman’s recently published book *Imagining the Kibbutz: Visions of Utopia in Literature and Film* (2015) is dedicated to the investigation of the changes and variations of the portrayal of kibbutz in Israeli literature and film. Omer-Sherman finds that ‘the kibbutz continues to serve Israel's literary world as a sort of a moral barometer [...] even after its shimmering promise has faded, the kibbutz ideal endures as a profound catalyst for the moral imagination of Israel's writers’ (Omer-Sherman in Palgi and Reinhartz 2011: 154). While Omer-Sherman’s focus is on the much-discussed tensions between the collective and the individual in the kibbutz, one chapter in his book is dedicated to depictions of the kibbutz’s ‘others’, namely Mizrahi Jews and Palestinians. This study is disappointingly limited to the way by which Jewish-Israeli (and mostly Ashkenzi) writers perceive the ‘other’ in the context of the kibbutz and not vice versa.¹⁴

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¹³ Though not necessarily kibbutz-born, these groups are organised by the historic youth movements of the kibbutz (see section 1) and its members are commonly graduates of high-ranking units of the IDF (Dror 2011). Both these elements are well established sources of symbolic capital (as theorised by Pierre Bourdieu) within Zionist and Social Zionist dogmas, their material advantage notwithstanding.

¹⁴ Other noteworthy examples of recent scholarship on kibbutz-related visual cultures are the study of the film scholars Eldad Kedem and Gilad Padva, who surveyed the cinematic discourse on the kibbutz as reflected in about thirty films made between 1933 and 2007 (2011) and Edna Barromi Perlman’s study of practices and conventions of photographing children on kibbutzim between 1948 and 1967 (2012). Additional areas of kibbutz culture in which some research has been conducted is dance, which I will discuss in the following chapter in relation to ethnic-drag, and kibbutz Judaism of which notable are the works of Rabbi Shalom Lilker (1982), Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don Yehiya (1983), Anita Shapira (1997) and Moti Ze’ira (2002).
Conclusion

This chapter surveyed several discursive and disciplinary areas through which the kibbutz came into being as an historiography and a body of knowledge throughout the twentieth century, and their evolution into the first two decades of the twenty-first. Working against the grain of political traditions which place the year-zero of the history of violence in Israel-Palestine in 1948 (the prime formative moment in the modern national narratives of Israelis and Palestinians alike), my examination follows Shafir, Wolf, Sabbagh-Khoury and others in retracing its roots in the turning point of Zionism from plantation-style colonies (moshavot) to an organised operation of settler-colonialism. In this historical crossroads the kibbutz and its peculiar duality of socialism and colonialism stands, appealing to the sentiments of a growing class of young marginalised Eastern-European Jews and presenting an effective method of overtaking and settling lands. Within several years, the model of the ‘large-kvutza’ powered by its networks of youth movements across Europe would lead to an irreversible demographic precedent in Palestine, setting in motion the process of Zionist settler colonialism. Always remaining a selected minority, the kibbutz is used as an effective promotion to the idea of agricultural settlement in Palestine, long after the idealised socialistic utopia ceases to reflect its reality. In turn, socialism becomes the façade of a gradual efficient campaign of landgrab and dispositions of indigenous Palestinians, the results of which – as well as the continuation thereof – are to be found in every aspect of life in contemporary Israel-Palestine.

Despite this, the study of the modes and trends through which the kibbutz evolved as a discipline – first as the ‘signal non-failure’ of attempted socialism and later as a privileged site for ethnographies of social engineering or the organisational and economic study of its decline – outlines the intellectual and scholarly genealogy of isolated questions of communality and socialism from the reality of colonialism. These are neither malevolent nor conspiratory, but rather are the lines of settler culture brought about by the repetitions of disavowal, shaping in discourse the elimination of the indigenous which unfolds – before, after, or simultaneous to it – corporeally and in landscape. This examination allows for the understanding of the meaning and function of phenomenological lines as theorised by Ahmed to bear in the context of settler-culture the qualities of Foucault’s ‘discipline’ – ‘imply[ng] an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result and […] exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement’ (Foucault [1977]
1995: 137). Turning now to the study of performance, I demonstrate how the articulation of such lines facilitate nuanced understanding of practices of racial and ethnic mimicry in Zionist settler-culture and served to contextualise them as simultaneously products of the settler-colonial process as well as its means.
2. REORIENTING ETHNIC DRAG
Racial Mimicry in Settler Culture

Locating Ethnic-Drag in Settler-Culture

The starting point for this chapter is a memory from my kindergarten days in Kibbutz Giva’at Haim. We were told one day that we were going to observe something special: we were going to visit an African village. In a grove at the kibbutz’s outskirts, we met the older children of the elementary school, dressed in straw skirts, building makeshift huts between the trees, dancing and singing. Their bodies and faces were covered with charcoal. As children often react to masked actors or clowns, we were mostly frightened by this strange and undecipherable sight. Lately, when I questioned my parents about this memory, they showed me photographs of themselves as children, costumed much like the children I remembered. More than alarm, or embarrassment, I found these images very strange. People I shared them with at first did not understand what it was they were seeing, finding it difficult to contextualise or explain them. With the phenomenological study of settler-culture, the obliqueness of these images and the performance they document deems them conspicuous.

Figure 7: Children perform Africa Day in Kibbutz Kabri. 1960’s, exact year unknown. Sourced from the archive of Kibbutz Kabri, photographer unknown.
The re-encounter with this personal cultural knowledge of Africa Day which was stored dormant in the background of my perception of the kibbutz, Zionism, settler-colonialism and self, drew my attention to the wider question of the role of performance of racial mimicry and the embodiment of an ethnic Other in Zionist settler-culture. They joined other objects such as the images of the Palestinians and east-African demonstrators I have explored in the introduction, or experiences such as dressing up in my friend Eihab’s clothes to visit the mosque in Leilet Al Kader (Ramadan’s holiest of nights). This chapter is therefore an investigation of settler-practices of ethnic and racial mimicry. I examine my understating of drag after Ahmed as the incapacitation or suspension of straightening devices against two examples, or archives, of ethnic mimicry in Zionist settler culture: Arabface — the intentional signification through performance of ‘Arabs’, and blackface — performance of mimicry of people of African dissent. As I will demonstrate, the performance of mimicry of each of these racial-ethnic groupings is instrumental not only to the consolidation of Zionist settler self and space (subject), as historian Scott Deloria (Deloria 1998) discusses in relation to performance of redface in the US, but it also actively participates in the symbolic process of settler colonialism. It is through these practices that the role of culture, both symbolically and socially, is obviated as a settling mechanism. Simultaneously, when attended to closely, and when phenomenological workings of drag are considered, performances of ethnic drag within Zionist settler-culture seem to offer surprising angles of and potentials for decolonisation.

The term ethnic drag was coined by performance scholar Katrin Sieg in her book on racial, ethnic, and gender mimicry in Germany, where she extends the category of drag, to include cross-ethnic performances. For Sieg, ethnic drag stands for a practice that excludes the material bodies of cultural Others and appropriates or ventriloquizes their voices. The displacement, which reiterates the symbolic of colonial histories and attendant subject formations, instructs spectators how not to see the power and property relations that underwrite constructions of nationality even after race was elided from official discourse. It offers a critical vantage point from which the internal logic of nationality, race, and gender can be understood, as well as marking the locus of its most acute internal instability’ (2009:86).

I follow Sieg in her identification of the operations of drag with interruption of regimes of perception and as a marker of their instability. However, several difficulties emerge from her formulation of drag and, within it, what she terms ethnic drag, particularly when shifting from
a postcolonial paradigm within which her work is adamantly rooted to that of a settler-colonial one. Firstly, although taking care not to ‘postulate gender, sexuality, and race as analogues’, the very grouping of the different case studies she explores reflects her understanding of drag as reliant on performance of crossing between binary categories. Sieg also ignores the genealogies of practice and etymology of the term, referred to by her as ‘classic drag’ (28), which, as I have shown in the introduction, is imbricated on particular traditions of queer performance and is not necessarily synonymous with crossing or even with mimicry. Secondly, Sieg’s careful and convincing attempts to create a comprehensive epistemology through which to comprehend a wide range of representational performance practices hinges on the study of nation, national subject formation, and ‘the intricate ways in which race […] and sexuality’ are predicated on it and vice versa (23). While this conceptual focus may well be adequate within the German context, with its specific traditions of nationalism, colonialism, racism, and performance, it would fall short in a settler-colonial one. In fact, the prevalent assumption of the sameness of national formations – refuted fundamentally by postcolonial and more directly in settler-colonial theory – problematises equations such as Sieg’s alignment of the texts she studies to those studied by historian Eric Lott on the American minstrel show for example (1995). While the former is routed in and resulting from a European national project generating its constitutive Others in a form of (racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual) minorities, the latter is eminently related to settler-colonial power relations. As such, the mimicry and impersonation of blacks in the US cannot be isolated from the function of exogenous groups (whether as forced or immigrant labourers) who are meant to replace indigenous labour on indigenous lands (Mamdani 2015).

The absence of settler-colonial perspectives from the well-established study field of American blackface and minstrelsy – influential scholarship which in turn informs the study of tropes of racial mimicry worldwide – represents one of the most acute gaps in research which this project works to fill in. I will do so by applying it to performance of racial-ethnic mimicry in a different though related settler space. In his study of the history of blackface on the Hebrew stage, Eitan Bar-Yosef cites performance scholar Catherine Cole who notes that what made the American minstrel show so racist ‘was that blackness and African American culture became the unequivocal signifier for ignorance, disorder and the grotesque’ (cited in Bar-Yosef 2013: 128). However, Bar-Yosef contends, ‘outside the United States blackface could attain different meanings, divorced from the ideological weight associated with the specific race hierarchies
germane to a particular culture’ (ibid). Bar-Yosef marks an important distinction in relation to studies of performance-studies scholars such as Coles’ work on blackface in postcolonial Ghana (Cole 2001), Nadia Davids and Chinua Thelwell on the minstrel in South Africa (Davids 2013; Thelwell 2013), Tracy Davis on minstrels in Britain (Davis 2013) or Halifu Osumare on mimicry of blacks in Japanese Hip-Hop (Osumare 2001). However, the relevance of the American minstrel as a product of settler-culture, when compared to racial mimicry of blacks in 1950s and 1990s Habima productions of the racially as well as settler-colonially charged musical *Cry the Beloved Country*, is entirely missing from Bar-Yosef’s analysis.55 Such research is oriented towards the (white) settler and its experiences of empire and nation, risking the enhancement of settler-colonial processes rather than advancing their exposure and critique. A phenomenological approach, on the other hand, poses the question of whose identity and agency was relegated to the background and ‘invisiblised’ in Zionist settler space, while the progressive text of *Cry the Beloved Country* and its performance of decolonisation and reconciliation in South Africa gained such strong identification by Israeli audiences. This is the line of questioning I attempt to pursue in the following study of two forms of popular performances of Arabface in Israeli media, and later the educational performance traditions of the Nations of Nature in kibbutzim. Addressed anachronistically, the three case studies represent different examples, or orientations (as pertaining to physical, discursive, or symbolic spaces) of the workings of ethnic drag in a settler-culture.

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55 Habima (Hebrew: The Stage) is Israel’s national theatre. Founded in 1918 in Moscow as an avant-garde Hebrew-speaking theatre group, their immigration to Palestine in 1931 (officially endorsed as a national theatre in 1958) was a well-publicised symbolic milestone of Zionist settlement and naturalisation of the settlement project by means of erecting national institutions (Tartakovsky 2013).
Shefita and Fauda – Hyper-contemporary Arabface

Shefita is a peculiar though resilient phenomenon in Israeli popular culture, often regarded as a multicultural innovation. A persona created by the Jewish Israeli performer Rotem Shefi, Shefita specialises in covering English songs with a unique twist: using a fake grotesque Arabic accent. The television series Fauda fictionalises the activity of a specialised security-force unit of ‘Mista’arvim’ whose members disguise themselves as Palestinians and infiltrate Palestinian society in order to collect intelligence and execute sensitive operations. Created by Israeli-Jews, both Shefita and Fauda engage in the representation of an Arab Other, articulating its meanings and symbolic economies. The emergence of two such distinct cases of popular representation of Arabness, in the case of Shefita, and of Palestinians in that of Fauda is even more intriguing when considered against the backdrop of contemporary Jewish-Israeli public discourse. In the last two decades, public opinion in Israel has sweepingly gravitated towards nationalistic, separatist and xenophobic sentiments. Since the events of the Second Intifada in 2000, Palestinian citizens of Israel have gradually been marked as external to the state’s body politics de-facto, a trend visible in an openly ethnocentric legislation and in parliamentary discourse as reflected in the 2019 elections and their aftermath. The Israeli mainstream’s legitimacy of and compliance with the state-sanctioned violence and military oppression of Palestinians in the West Bank and mostly Gaza have reached unprecedented highs, where the latter is reduced to dire humanitarian conditions and dozens are killed in demonstrations on a weekly basis (Avenue et al. 2019). Within this political and social climate, the two recent performance tropes encourage us to rethink popularity as an indicator of social trends and a decipherer of cultural currents as biopolitical. What does the impersonation of an ‘Arab’ or ‘Palestinians’ signify within contemporary Zionist settler-culture and how does it sit with the underlying processes of settler colonialism? In a manner that exposes settler-colonialism’s inherent contradiction with nationalism, the more violence directed towards the indigenous the more visible they are as political subjects. The eminently national need to construct a tangible and therefore unified enemy (‘the Arabs’) recovers the structural and phenomenological processes of settler-disavowal. In the following I outline through the related but essentially different examples of Shefita and Fauda two strategies of settler disavowal emanating from this (apparent) paradox. Contrary to their general reception with liberal audiences, while Fauda’s ethnic drag capitalises on extreme mimetic adjacency and so is more impervious to criticism, Shefita’s racist masquerade dialectically opens itself to decolonising trajectories.
Although significantly routed within the local contexts of their formation, both Shefita and Fauda have proliferated in and are being streamed through online platforms. Shefita was titled ‘the Arab diva who broke the internet’ after viewings of her music-video exceeded million views on YouTube in August 2015 (*Orly & Guy Morning Show*). Fauda is the first Israeli television production not only to be bought by the global online streaming network Netflix for distribution, but also for production, rebranded as a Netflix-original in November 2016 (*Shechnik* 2016). This made the second season of the show an international co-production rather than a singly Israeli cultural product. Both Shefita and Fauda are also reported to have been watched with fascination in the Arab world (Noriel 2017), traditionally regarded in Israel as hostile or oblivious to Israeli cultural products. The unparalleled attention directed towards these two performances of ethnic drag and their commercial success highlights their relevance for the study of contemporary cultural representations and the publics they assemble globally. Furthermore, they bring to the fore the role of new viewing-cultures in the commodification and circulation of local discourses of performance and their demurral of the local-global binary. As such, they also indicate how networks of racist violence of settler colonialism exceed the local and – again, the national – through commodification, and are to be thought of and theorised as produced and perpetuated by global networks of power; much like disaster capitalism and arms trade (*Klein* 2008).

**Shefita’s Freeform Arab**

Rotem Shefi is a trained singer-songwriter, and for several years attempted to breakthrough in the Tel-Aviv music scene. While this did not happen to Shefi herself, it did happen to her made-up persona Shefita, whose cover-version to the Radiohead’s hit-song *Karma Police* went viral on YouTube in 2013 (*Shalev* 2003). Shefi features in the video dressed in an oriental garment and riding an old horse-cart in the streets of Jaffa’s gentrified flea market. Two distinctly Arab features of the cover version are the use of instruments typical of Arabic classical music, and Shefi’s accent. The latter functions as the main marker of Arab otherness, as much as the burnt-cork marked blackness in the US minstrel. I find this element most revealing of the constitution of Shefi’s practice as pejorative mimicry, exercised from an uncritical, privileged position and, one that exceeds innocent bad taste of mimicking another’s speech. In the reality of
segregation, surveillance and population control in Israel, accents play a crucial role in official and unofficial systems of racial profiling and discrimination. Numerous documentaries and news reports in Israeli media have exposed that people speaking Hebrew with a discernible Arabic accent have fewer opportunities to attain a job, rent a flat or enter a night club in Jewish cities even when their ‘Arabness’ is not signified through physical appearance, religious affiliation or place of residence. The focus on the voice as the locus of racist mimicry is an elusive and often overlooked formal element in different traditions of ethnic drag. Lott remarks that: ‘every time you hear an expansive white man drop into his version of black English, you are in the presence of blackface’s unconscious return’ (1993:5). Indeed, visual devices like blacking-up (or adorning prostatic long noses) are more readily policed and banned by regimes of political correctness than the use of voice and accent. In situations where tone of skin is inadequate to signify racial difference, the mimicry of tone of voice tends to take centre stage. As Sieg shows in her work, such was the case in the performance tradition of ‘Jewface’ in nineteenth to mid twentieth century Germany, capitalising on what was known as the ‘Jewish voice’ (2009:35). But Shefi does not intend to parody or ridicule. She insists in her early interviews that her performance of Shefita is motivated by love and respect to Arabic culture. She offers the example of hearing the sound of the call for prayer coming from the mosque of the Arab village neighbouring her native town as an example for personal relation and identification (Shalev 2013).

However, the isolation of the accent component as a leading aesthetic device of mimicry is further enhanced by Shefita’s refrain from actually speaking Arabic, perhaps mainly due to Shefi’s complete lack of knowledge of the Arabic language. Since Karma Police, Shefi has released five more music videos in which she covers English songs of Nirvana, Alanis Morrissett and Aerosmith as Shefita. Although none of them has gained the outstanding online popularity of the first Karma Police video in 2013, Shefi has not continued to perform her own music or perform as herself. Her last interview as herself was published in 2013 and ever since she has only been interviewed as Shefita, insisting on speaking her Arabic-accented English.

As a cultural fiction, Shefita offers an abstract, updated quotation of Arabness with no source; a simulacrum. More than anything, Shefi’s ‘Arab diva’ is devoid of any marker of Palestinian identity or agency. In her early shows, Shefi used to make it a point to inform her audiences that Shefita was ‘born in a rich village between Dubai and Iran and accidentally arrived in
Israel in which she fell in love immediately’ (Brener 2015). As such this fiction aligns the public she creates with the west-facing prosperity of the Gulf States, where indigenous Palestinians are implicitly deducing from the sum group ‘Arabs; a popular gesture within a nationalist discourse sustained by an ‘Arab enemy.’ In this way Shefi provides Israeli audiences with a kosher oriental fantasy of a generalised Arab, whose language and jokes they understand. A character that in coming from outside orientates them as locals, indeed natives. In the world of this fantastic ethnic drag, the Palestinians whose mosque prayer-calls have inspired Shefi and on whose lands of destroyed villages Shefi’s native town was erected have never existed, nor their language. For this characteristic of the Shefita-act, I call this mode of Zionist ethnic drag ‘Free-From,’ following the logic of unhealthy food produce engineered not to contain sugar, gluten, caffeine, or fat, thus enabling the consumers to eat it without risking their health. Shefita fictionalises and trades an Arabness devoid – free from – ‘Palestinianness’ as signifying indigeneity and indigenous subjectivity, agency, political claims and rights, and it in this quality that her popularity with settler-audiences inheres.

Within the prevalent discourse of nationalism, Shefita is misunderstood as an appropriation of the culture of national minorities. This interpretation would assume some underlying societal-ideological and legislative systems that account for these minorities, defining and protecting them and their culture, or failing to do so. The hegemonic national group is reproduced by a dialectic relation to them. In theorising practices of impersonation of native Americans in post-war Germany as reactions to the Nazi genocide (by means of surrogation), Sieg finds that ethnic drag ‘instructs spectators how not to see the power and property relations that underwrite constructions of nationality even after race was elided from official discourse’ (2009:86). Here, however, the national – that is the public of settler subjects gathering to face Shefita as their Arab other, as Israelis – makes possible the un-seeing of Palestinian Arabs and settler-colonial relations with them. If they do accept her as an Arab, it is as a fiction of a national-minority Arab, and this endorsing her seemingly expresses inclusivity, tolerance, openness, and mostly good humour. Though appropriation may alter an object, it still preserves its existence and often enhances it, whether ethically sound or flawed. Whatever cultural or ethnic established signifiers of Arabness are at Shefi’s disposal, which are in fact very few, the context within which she operates necessarily forms her signification as erasure and elimination rather than appropriation, at least as far as Arabness pertains to Palestinians in Israel-Palestine. Thus, the
toxicity and violence of this act are far more obvious, and its place on a continuum (process) of occupation, dispossession, and killing is contextualised.

In a workshop I conducted with a mixed group of Jewish and Palestinian youth in Jaffa in January 2017, I screened several of Shefita’s music videos and asked the participants to comment. Most of the Palestinian participants had not seen Shefita before and the first one to respond said ‘I don’t understand the words she is singing, is she from India?’ When I explained that this performance is meant to signify an Arabic accent, most Palestinian participants burst out laughing. As many of the Jewish participants already knew Shefita before, their reactions oscillated between embarrassment and disbelief at the Palestinians’ failure to decode Shefita’s ‘Arabness’ and they launched an avid defence of the talent and playful inventiveness of the singer. Taking place as part of the ongoing activity of an established political youth Partnership (Sadaka-Reut NGO), the setting for the workshop was one in which underlying settler-colonial relations were made present constructively and deliberately, as part of the organisation’s pedagogy of decolonising education. Both Jewish and Palestinian members of the youth group who, at the time of the workshop, had already worked together for several months were familiar both with each other and with critical political discourse. Yet the Jewish members of the group were unable to recognise the repercussions of symbolic elimination of Palestinians generated by Shefita’s act and the Palestinian members struggled to articulate their resistance to it (indeed how can one prosecute Shefita for appropriating Arab culture when a moment before one decoded her as Indian rather than Arab?). Fully complicit in Shefita’s disavowal of the indigenous agency of their Palestinian groupmates, the Jewish participants highlighted her talent and comedic qualities in refuting my suggestion that the imitation might be problematic. A mere few took a critical stand towards it, deeming it racist or offensive. It was only at this part of the discussion, where the gap between the two groups was exposed as phenomenological – what does one see or not see – that the Palestinian participants expressed their anger at both the performer and their fellow groupmates for endorsing her. It is not so much what Shefita does as much as what she means in the context of Zionist settler-colonialism; or, rather, what she does phenomenologically.

A similar dynamic I suggest is taking place today in Israeli public sphere, as a result of Shefita’s participation in the reality TV song contest Hakokhav Haba (Heb. Rising Star) that nominates the Israeli representative to the 2019 Eurovision (mako.co.il). This show exposed her to
millions of viewers and turned the discourse around her act and its ethics into a heated debate in printed and social media. The acceptance and normalization of her act on such a magnified scale on one hand, and the opportunity to voice objections to it on the other facilitate the ‘presencing’ of settler-colonial processes even when their articulation in discourse is still incoherent and vague. One such example was the initiative of Fakhri Sa’id, a Palestinian student of the Tel-Aviv University College in Jaffa to cancel her show, leading to a televised debate between Shefi and Sa’id (Cohen and Loksh 2019). Through talking back to Sheifta, Sa’id was able to express his objection to her and, by this, perform a resistance to the wider mechanisms of Zionist colonial oppression, greater than the specific situation. In this, the made-up persona’s drag of racial-crossing suspended the straightening devices of settler disavowal. The decoy that Rotem Shefi created and named Shefita was used in this case as a concrete target for anti-colonial dissent, where denied power relations of settler colonialism are somewhat exposed due to the visibility of her grotesque ethnic-drag and the instabilities and inconsistencies (obliques) it reveals within the (lines of) political and ideological discourse.

Figure 8: A screenshot of Shefita performs with dancers in the reality show Hakhokhav Haba, 2019.

The Shefita’s case brings us back to the consideration of drag as marking practices that produce (intentionally or not) phenomenological interference, an intervention that suspends or resist naturalised, normalised regimes of perception. As a practice of drag, Shefita’s ethnic drag challenges orientations; that is, the ways bodies and their significations are found in space with
no sign for their conditions of arrival. The implication of masquerading as an Arab – even in the free-from style exercised by Shefi - in a space devoted to the disavowal of indigenous Palestinian Arabs, cannot but draw the attention to how Arabness is signified to begin with and, by that, re-introduce the disavowed Palestinian into discourse (view). This dynamic is further complicated in the following example of ethnic drag, where in a complete opposite fashion to Sheifta’s the mimicry of Palestinians claims utmost detailed accuracy and authenticity.

Faafa and the Super-Arab

The tactics of racial-ethnic impersonation deployed in the action television fiction Faafa explore an opposite route of appropriation and erasure. The series portrays most realistically the activity of Mista’arvim - a specialised undercover military unit that undertakes sensitive operations within the Palestinian civilian areas of the West Bank. What ‘undercover’ means in this context is that Jewish-Israeli soldiers are trained to mimic Palestinians to perfection, mastering typical style of dress, walk, body language and, of course, dialect. In other words, the units of Mista’arvim use racial cross-dressing for military purposes. What the makers of Faafa Lior Raz and Avi Issacharov have done in turn is to use their military experience of Mista’arvim ethnic drag for entertainment purposes. As Faafa is now broadcasted in numerous countries, Raz and Issacharov can be said to have launched the entertainment equivalent of the Israeli security industry, providing technology and knowledge for military, surveillance, and population-control purposes worldwide.56 The abundance of Israeli manufactured weapons featuring in the series indeed suggest reciprocity which is more than a mere formal likeness of the two industries.

Faafa’s allusion to performance traditions of racial mimicry is apparent already in its marketers’ choice of visual language, presenting the main characters in a double picture, comparing them as they are dressed-up as Palestinians and when they are dressed as themselves, that is, as ‘Israeli’ or ‘normal’. Most probably unintended and uninformed, these images quote rather faithfully the aesthetic logic of nineteenth century poster advertisement of the US minstrel shows. Even the subtleties of typography are recruited to express the delicacy of mimicry, when diacritic signs are replaced almost unnoticeably between the Arabic and the

56 The popular series Homeland (2011) preceded Faafa, but is an adaptation of the Israeli Hatoofim
Hebrew logos. All of these are joined to the recurring theme to which considerable screen-time is dedicated, the act of dressing-up, applying make-up, dying hair and beards, perfecting accents, and mastering mannerisms; flawlessly transforming into Palestinians. The spectacle and challenge of passing authentically, which is so pertinent to many mimetic practices is a vital component in Fauda’s dramatic structure as well as its aesthetic appeal.

Fauda demonstrates the stakes of racial mimicry in the first minute of the first episode. The short scene opens with an aerial shot of the inside of a large mosque, where people are seen praying. In the next shot, loud banging on the mosque’s doors is heard, joined by nervous cries for help, as an ill-looking person is rushed into the main praying hall by two men and a woman (her gender signified by a long black dress and hijab). They are asking the people in the mosque to bring him water while the man is clutching his chest, suggesting he might be having a heart attack. As the people who prayed gather around them in order to help, the ill person quickly turns to one of them, pulling out a gun while the group who brought him in follows suit; thus, revealing themselves to both the viewers and the Palestinian characters in the mosque as Mista’arvim. They abduct one of the people in the mosque while threatening the others with guns to keep them from interfering. When a person who stood behind the Mista’arvim pulls out a gun he is quickly shot dead by the woman, waiting by the mosque’s entrance. The next screen shot follows a car that had waited for the Mista’arvim unit outside the mosque, into which they all climb in and quickly drive off. Inside the car the woman removes her headscarf, revealing herself to be a Mista’arev man. The narrative of the rest of the episode follows them, and we never get to see the people who were left behind in the mosque. In this snap performance of infiltration and abduction, ethnic impersonation and gender impersonation
unite in an action that leaves the safest of places, a house of prayer, breached and in unending uncertainty. This establishing scene confirms a state of being in which for Palestinians no one and nowhere is safe, while for Israeli Mista’arvim nowhere and nothing is out of reach.

While completely absent from Shefita’s world, the heightened presence of Palestinians in Fauda serves as a crucial point of comparison. The series’ commitment to authentic representation dictates that all characters are depicted by actors of their respective national/ethnic group.57 Furthermore, the makers have stated in an interview that special Palestinian advisors were employed on the set to supervise the meticulously accurate depiction of Palestinians in all scenes, alongside military and secret-services experts (Noriel 2017). A British colleague who follows the show shared with me that often he finds it difficult to distinguish the Israelis from the Palestinians as in many situations the only clear distinction is indicated through the use of either Hebrew or Arabic (respectively). This may have bearings on the very intelligibility of the show’s narrative, as much of the tension that sustains the plot and emanates from the ability to disguise and infiltrate. Within Fauda’s drama, the Palestinian characters inevitably serve as dupes whose failure to recognise the true Israeli identity of the soldiers serves as the ultimate indication of the mastery of the Mista’arvim’s mimicry. The gender scholar Amy Robinson describes the act of passing as a ‘triangular theatre of identity’, where ‘a member of the in-group witnesses the failure of a person outside the group to register the identity of another in-group member’ (1994: 716). Appropriating the model which originally describes the ways queer and people of colour negotiate white and/or heteronormative environments, for the most part in Fauda both the viewers and the Mista’arvim are set-up as members of the same group and the Palestinians as the duped Other.58 This relationship is turned around at one point when a young widowed Palestinian woman dresses up as an Israeli in order to blow herself up in a Tel-Aviv night club, avenging the death of her husband by the Mista’arvim. Rather than signalling a potential reciprocity of passing, this scene seems to alert the danger of mimicry as weapon when is used by Palestinians against Israelis, when the roles of infiltrator and duped might have reversed but the spectator remains the detector.59

57 Palestinians play Palestinian characters and Jewish-Israelis Jewish-Israeli ones respectively.
58 Sieg also borrows Robison’s ‘triangular theatre of identity’ in her study of antisemitic Jewish impersonation on the German stage (Siege 2009: 19).
59 The second season which aired 2018 features more mimicry of Palestinians as Israelis. This might be related to the much greater involvement of Netflix in the script and the production.
The symbolic and aesthetic implications of Fauda’s performance of crossing are severe. Unlike Shefita, the appropriation of culture, dress, speech, body language, all framed through the performance of authenticity and accuracy are turned bluntly necropolitical (Mbembe 2003). In a reality of segregation and discrimination, the clear majority of Jewish Israelis are Arabic-illiterate while most Palestinians have at least some knowledge of Hebrew and many have a complete mastery of it. In this reality, the Arabic lingual sphere remains to some degree shielded from hegemonic penetration and appropriation, preserving a Palestinian-discursive zone to which most Israelis find it difficult to enter. Priding themselves for bringing (Palestinian) Arabic to Israeli television prime-time (Noriel 2017), Fauda’s makers have symbolically at least pierced this protective layer, subtitling and making accessible to non-Arab viewers what until now was out of reach. This fictional dynamic of undermining Palestinian closed private spheres is extended in Fauda to physical spaces such as mosques, homes, bedrooms and showers where the camera penetrates undisturbed. Fauda’s cinematic syntax pays special attention to the bodies of Palestinian women, where plot and filmography occasionally collide in providing opportunities to peek under hijabs and bourkas. The role of the detector assigned to the viewer through witnessing Palestinians being duped is thus extended to constitute them as the Mista’arvim themselves. It fictionalises them as the infiltrators whose privileged gaze is permitted into the most intimate and closed off areas of Palestinian life. The real-life precarity of Palestinian bodies routinely under occupation in the West Bank (where the first two seasons are situated) provides all the opportunities and contextual legitimacy for this fantasy of absolute control.

In order to articulate the specific mechanisations of Fauda as (ethnic) drag, I turn to a critique of the feminist performance scholar Peggy Phelan on the implications of gender-drag on women. Phelan argues that:

> within the economy of patriarchal desire which frames […] male cross-dressing, the figure of the woman is appropriated as a sign to validate male authority. His authority is determined by how fully he can ‘wear’ her; in wearing her, however, he renders her actual presence unnecessary ([1993] 2005: 99).

Significantly, Phelan provided this observation in the context of the debate that surrounded Jennie Livingston’s movie *Paris is Burning* on drag-balls in Harlem of the 1980s (Livingston 1990). Since then, not only the binary approach that discusses the symbolism of drag in terms of 'man-dressed-as-woman' was challenged by queer theory and more critically by queer
performers, the very use of the term and the development of queer performance since rendered it partial and insufficient. However, when adapted to the context of the kind of ethnic-drag that is circulated, even celebrated, in Fauda, one of extreme and hyperbolised binary which is required by the process of settler-colonialism, I find Phelan’s position particularly indicative.

The form of symbolic displacement and erasure of Palestinian indigenous agency that take place in Fauda is doubled. First, in paraphrasing Phelan’s insight, the mimicry of Palestinians is constructed so convincingly that it constitutes the Mista’arev as a potential surrogate. Its aesthetics implies that the ‘adorning’ of Palestinians constitutes an exciting element of contemporary Israeliness. Similarly, Deloria places the assimilative practice of ‘playing Indian’ to white Americans (1998: 7). Secondly, the Mista’arvim characters are very good at talking like them, walking like them, falling in love with other Palestinians like them, even resisting Zionist colonialism like them, to the extent that ‘real’ Palestinians are deemed somewhat redundant. But the excess of drag takes this logic a step further exactly because it is a performance, a costume. The Mista’arev represents a fantasy in which an Israeli is not only everything a Palestinian can ever be, but more. Firstly, because he is protected and fully informed by the powerful apparatus of the Israeli security forces. This is realised in Fauda through the recurring drone-images of Palestinian cities and the role of the commander who is streaming intelligence and tipping off the soldiers in-action through an unseen earphone, endowing them with clear strategic advantage over the less technologically advanced Hamas warriors. Secondly, while Palestinian agency is static and predetermined (always just Palestinians), the Mista’arev is both - Israeli and Palestinian, alternately and never together, consumes and contains everything. If Shefita fashions a palatable Arabness, free-from Palestinian indigeneity, Fauda’s Mista’arev not only can substitute the Palestinian Arabs, he is an improved model, a ‘super-Arab.’

These two examples of Arabface mark a change of trajectory in Zionist settler culture. One of the distinguishing features of Zionism from other settler projects is its ethnocentric exclusion of the indigenous gentile from the Jewish settler body politque and the inability of the former to assimilate (and thus disappear) in the latter even after a long period of time. Wolfe, Veracini, and Shafir all read the processes of racialisation, segregations, and intensification of national (as well as nationalistic) trends in Israel-Palestine in relation to this factor and in clear different from more (Brazil) or less (New-Zealand) inclusive settler projects (Shafir 1995; Veracini 2010, 2014; Wolfe 2016). The scholar of photography Dor Guez has recently contextualised
this in relation to practices of racial mimicry, bringing to scholarly attention the early Zionist trend to be photographed in traditional Arab garments and typical clothing of nineteenth-century Ottoman fashion. Guez contends that this performative practice is embedded within the dual orientalist ideology of early Zionism, which sought to ‘colonize the Orient’ but also to identify with it and be immersed within it, i.e. retrace ‘authentic roots’ and ‘return’ to it. ‘Their “selfies”, says Guez, ‘formed an attempt to hasten and materialize their becoming of a ‘new other’ (Guez 2015: 19). Special attention is given in his study to the role of the staged and photographed image in the writing of colonial history and reiteration of ideology (16, 32). However, Guez relates the abrupt cessation of this practice to the deadly riots that took place in 1929 (known as the Tarpat riots in Zionist historiography), after which Palestinians were no longer perceived by Zionists as a ‘friendly’ and ‘harmless’ part of the land (10). The next and last example I explore as ethnic-drag can be seen as the substitution of the typical indigenous object of racial mimicry by a different kind of racialised other.
A Nation Amongst the Nations – of Nature

*Yom Africa* (Africa Day) consisted of educational performances in elementary school education in kibbutzim, that featured mimetic presentations of Africans by children. Zionist cultural legacies of constructing imagined notions of “Africa” and “Africans” in Israeli public discourse have been receiving growing attention in recent scholarship (Bar-Yosef 2014; Yacobi 2015). However, the field of amateur performances of racial mimicry and the role of kibbutz culture in this tradition has not received sufficient attention. The acknowledgement and theorisation of Africa Day as a unique practice provides insight into the Zionist genealogy of othering and its dialectics of oppositional assertion of identity. Following the cultural historian Eitan Bar-Yosef (2014), I argue that this practice must be considered vis-à-vis discourses of antisemitic racialisation of the Jewish body and the attempt of Zionist Socialism to revise them and, by that, to unmake race itself, in order to both retrace the motivations for Africa Day and to outline its typologies. Conceptualised in this way, Africa Day presents a complex example of ethnic drag as a site of simultaneous reiteration and renegotiation of racist representation.

I read Africa Day in the context of the ambition of kibbutz performance culture to orientated bodies by ‘turn[ning] theory directly into physical practice’ (Jannarone 2017: 119). In his study of the early kibbutz days’ Omer Festival - an elaborate outdoor mass-performance inspired by descriptions of harvest festivals in the Jewish scriptures - the theatre scholar Abba Cherniack-Tzuriel quotes the performance’s leading instigator: ‘playing/acting was intrinsically linked with the transformation of the Jewish people from European city dwellers into a self-reliant nation of farmer-workers […]. Unless the Jewish people learned to play and act […] on the land, they could not be rooted in it’ (Matitayhu Shelem in Cherniack-Tzuriel 1977: 12). This attitude is manifested in multiple well-recorded acts of ideological embodiment in the kibbutz which preceded Africa Day. Cultural production of reinvention was especially needed in the light of Socialist Zionism’s sworn secularism. Most first-generation

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60 Performance historian Kimberly Jannarone critically reconstructs festivals that were created and performed in Paris in the aftermath of the French revolution between 1790 to 1794 (2017). Similar to the reality of the early kibbutz in its modernist-revolutionist approach of social engineering, these festivals were meant to substitute the old religious and monarchic festivals, imbuing public space and social life with the new values of the republic. Jannarone observes that ‘social relations generally emerge from practice, evolving throughout time via a largely unconscious, reflexive process, which is then theorised. The Revolutionaries of the 1790s, however […] attempted to reverse the direction of social construction, seeking to turn theory directly into physical practice’ (119).

61 The Hebrew word קחשמ (mishak) is used for both game or play, as a football game and for acting, as in method acting or role play.
kibbutz members were raised in more or less religious families. In the light of the new secular cult of labour and community that deconstructed every aspect of bourgeoisie living, two central aspects of social life remained unaccounted for: festivals and rites of passage, namely weddings, Bar-mitzvahs and funerals. Essential to community building and its self-acknowledgement, these three originally religious domains were not rejected by the kibbutz as was virtually every other aspect of religious life (such as synagogues, prayers, the study of the Torah, dietary restrictions [Kashrut] etc.). Instead, they became an opportunity for creative substitution, one that enhanced the values of the new culture in the making. It is no surprise then that a practice such as Africa Day would later have developed in this atmosphere; one that invites new interpretations of tradition, encourages the engagement through performance with ideas and the symbolic corporeal manifestation of ideologies.

Adjacent political challenge that resulted from the secularisation of Zionist settler communities was the loss of the religious connection, and claim, to the Land of Israel. In its place a new mythology of indigeneity needed to be constructed. A seminal link here was found in the first children who were born in the kibbutz. They were seen as the ultimate realisation of the settler project, as natives of the land (unlike their parents) and embodying the merged ideals of socialism and Zionism. In all of the major early-kibbutz festivals, such as the Omer Festival, Simchat Kelulot (marriage celebration) or the kibbutz-adapted Passover Seder, the children of the kibbutz were assigned key roles (Cherniack-Tzuriel 1977; Ingber 1985; Jacobson 2007 respectively). The kibbutz choreographer and cultural leader Lea Bergstein sums up the kibbutz’s sentiment to its children thus:

since our children were our most precious fruits, we wanted to show that very special connection of the lovely boys and girls as they grow, their love for each other, and the flowers and the greens growing all around them. The dances, as in all our ceremonies, were terribly important because we could show those ideas visually (Ingber 1985: 84).

Perceived as the kibbutz's ‘precious fruits’ and staged in flawless continuum with the flowers and greens cultivated in the kibbutz, children are seen as a performed aspect of the kibbutz itself and a living testimony to its ideological and material accomplishments.
The first documentation of an Africa Day performance (or of an earlier version of it) dates to 1952. The most recent record that I hold of this practice is my own recollection from the early 1990s. From conversations with people of several different kibbutzim it became clear that Africa Day did not take place much after that, nor did it receive any public or scholarly attention. I reconstruct Africa Day mainly from two texts written by two kibbutz educators, Dani Rozolio (1954) and Drora Magal (1969), complemented by images I found in kibbutz archives and my family’s photo albums. Dani and Drora also happen to have been members of my mother’s and father’s kibbutzim of origin respectively and were friends and colleagues of my grandparents. I came across their texts while working in the central archives of the Kibbutz Ha’Meuchad Movement and then again in the local archives of Giva’at Haim and Kabri.

Despite their being historical archived documents, my engagement with the texts is both motivated and influenced by their biographical proximity to me and my subject position. I read them against my own personal experience and multiple conversations with my grandparents, parents, and other family and kibbutz members.

I am interested in the ways by which the practice of Africa Day utilised the bodies of kibbutz children as a site for the projection of ideology and racial fantasies. Secondly, I ask what symbolic, ideological, and affective functions Africa Day served for the communities who initiated it and how these were manifested in its dramaturgy of communal participatory performance. My reckoning with its meanings serves to expose the settler-colonial site of the kibbutz as one in which processes of personal liberation, appropriation, and racialisation take place concomitantly, often overlapping and contradicting each other.

**The Performance of Africa Day**

Drora Magal was a kibbutz-born schoolteacher in Giva’at-Haim. She was also my father’s teacher and one of my grandmother’s closest friends, whom I remember fondly. The walls in my grandmother’s kibbutz apartment were decorated with several masks Magal brought back

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63 A qualification is warranted here, as in July 2019 I have come across a program for the organised school-vacation activities for children in Kibbutz Giva’at Haim, which included Africa Day. I was not able to attain records of this activity by the completion of this thesis and therefore cannot assess its relation to the mimetic practices of the historical Africa Day performances. This does however indicate the uncritical persistence of the legacy of this performance practice as ‘repertoire’ within kibbutz communities (Tylor 2003).

64 One of the two major movement under which kibbutzim are organised.
from her stay in Uganda. These were most likely the first representation I have seen in my life of East African performance culture. More than three decades earlier, Magal composed an educational programme that is presently kept at the Yad-Tabenkin Archive, one of the main archives of the Kibbutz Movement. Problematically, and typical of its time, the pedagogic protocol titled The Nations of Nature (Amei Hateva ימי העמים) is a detailed syllabus devised for kibbutz elementary-school students in their fourth year (about ten years old) (Magal, 1969: 1). This topic formed the kibbutz fourth-graders’ annual main focus of studies (the school’s annual theme). The last chapter in Magal’s text is dedicated to Africa and includes an elaborate description of Africa Day performances. The description presents Africa Day as it gradually evolved over two decades from its emergence in the early 1950s. Moreover, it is during the time in which her text was written that Africa Days performances seem to have gained their fullest and most elaborate form. Stylistically, the use of present tense in Magal’s writing theatricalises her description, endowing it with an aura of an ethnographic observation, or the objective-yet-engaged authority of a nature-film narrator. She opens by noting that:

Throughout the week preceding [Africa Day] Year Fours erect a range of African dwellings (Sudanese, Pygmies, etc.). African costumes are prepared, as well as weapons and decorations (costumes are also made for the parents). Big drums are constructed. Utensils made of natural resources are gathered (such as hollow pumpkins and bark) and will be used to eat and drink from (ibid: 26).

These extensive preparations testify to both the significance attached to and the resources allocated for Africa Day performances. Magal’s inclusion of specially made costumes for parents in an elementary-school activity further testifies to the social importance of this event. Kibbutz children used to live and sleep in houses designed for each age group while parents lived separately, assuming little to no engagement with their children’s schooling. Actively involving the parents in Africa Day elevated the status of the event in the eyes of the performing children, implying that this activity was perceived by the community as worth spending potential working or leisure hours on.

Magal goes on to describe the scenario of Africa Day itself: ‘[the students] rise in the morning, quickly tidy the [communal] house, dress themselves as Africans, apply makeup and

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65 A name that seems to be a direct translation from the German Naturvolk, i.e. “primitive people”.
66 All the translations from Hebrew are my own
decorations, [and] arrive at the African Village. They construct a fence around the village, prepare lunch and dance routines, then parade through the rest of the kibbutz.’

The performance extends beyond the confines of the students’ peer group or the domain of a standard Geography class through parading the kibbutz in costumes and makeup and the integration of another age group as a generalised enemy in the exercises of Africa Day. These form significant contact points of the performance with the wider kibbutz community, exposing it as a carnivalesque event that barges into the kibbutz’s every day. Upon the return from the parade, lunch is served, and immediately after, war:

After lunch (including bonfire roasted potatoes, whole chickens and fruit) the village is attacked (by another year group of the kibbutz school, dressed as Indians [Native Americans], Arabs or whatever they feel like) (ibid).

The conflation of Native Americans with Arabs in the list of casting options for the rival group which portrays the ‘enemy’ is intriguing, not only because it poses an atypical break from the prevalent aspiration for authentic representation in this practice. By aligning Arabs with ‘Peoples of Nature,’ Magal’s scenario seems to implicitly acknowledge their indigeneity, a stance that is consistently refuted in contemporary Zionist education and advocacy. The obliqueness of the practice of Africa Day in relation to lines of national narrative is disclosed through the play of colonial scenarios and imageries. Since an opponent entity is required for the simulation of ‘African’ rituals of war and peace making, ‘Arabs’ here are synonymous with ‘enemy’, similarly to the portrayal of ‘Indians’ in North American Westerners. The interchangeability of these ethnic categories confirms underlying settler-scenarios, to appropriate performance studies scholar Dayna Taylor’s term, and rehearsed sceneries of pioneer and frontier (2003).

Magal’s description concludes with the following:

After the battle, a peace ceremony is performed. The enemies dance and sing together. The African tribe (for which of course they need to choose a name)
performs its songs and dances and offers fruit to everyone. The parents arrive in the afternoon, dressed as Africans. A hunting-dance is performed (some depict the hunters, others the animals) and a dance is conducted around an ill person (an exorcism), then there is a hospitality ceremony for the guests (featuring a shaman, for whom the children have written a monologue), then a joint dance for hosts and guests [children and parents respectively] and learning a song together. Finally snacks - fruits, sunflower seeds etc. [are served] (ibid).

Fruit and sunflower seeds were a common type of refreshment in the 1960s kibbutz. While eating here serves as a cool-down from Africa Day, it simultaneously remains faithful to its themes by alluding to a generalised diet of hunter-gatherers. This duality can be seen as the linkage or point of contingency between the fantasy of the performance and the reality of kibbutz life, with its ideology of austerity, fitness, direct and literal relationship to land and communality.

Figure 11: Drora Magal (centre back) with students in Africa Day performance, Kibbutz Giva’at Haim, circa 1965. Family album, photographer unknown.

69 In Schechner’s ‘seven-part sequence of performance’ (2000:16-21), cool-down constitutes the withdrawal of performers from the realm of performance back to ‘normal,’ often expressed through joint eating and drinking (19).
Playing Anthropologists, Performing Friendship

Dani Rozolio was a primary school teacher in Kibbutz Kabri. In an article for the kibbutz educational review, he elaborates on the general curricular category of the ‘Nations of Nature’, which together with ‘The Blacks in Africa’ also included subtopics about Native Americans, Australian aborigines, Inuit and the peoples of Siberia. As in Magal’s Africa Day, these were often dramatized and impersonated in special performances that concluded a period of study. In attending to the motivations and objectives of this, Rozolio’s text manifests the phenomenological assumptions and workings – the orientation in space and time of the students performing it. Rozolio explains the educational importance of learning about ‘Nations of Nature’ as an appropriate introduction to the topic of the prehistoric man (1954: 57). His argument is that since the topic of prehistoric man might be too distant and abstract for the young students, they should first “be acquainted with the simple but complete cultures, close and known to nature” (Ibid; italics in the original). A decade later, Magal advises fellow-teachers to begin with the topic of the prehistoric man before the study of the “Peoples of Nature” The rationale behind her contention is that the initial knowledge of prehistoric man will enable the students to estimate the level of progress of each of the peoples that are encountered in the course of the study (1969: 2). As Rozolio himself testifies, this epistemology was largely borrowed from traditional Western anthropological discourse of the time and was hardly unique to kibbutz pedagogies. It does however seem to acquire additional meanings when embodied with such literality in a settler setting.

The Nations of Nature affords Magal and Rozolio the opportunity to construct narratives of race in space and time. Privileging experiential over theoretical learning, Rozolio’s text describes a voyage from the kibbutz to Africa as an overarching metaphor through which the teaching of this topic was conducted and delivered to pupils. The playful simulation of a scientific excursion to Africa here bares a symbolic gesture that surpasses the classic colonial archetype of Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1899) or the extensive accumulation of historical narratives and texts around ‘going native’ that inspired it (Huhndorf 2001; Lindqvist

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70 Rozolio uses the denominations Indianim (אינדיאנים; Indians) for Native Americans and Eskimoim (אסיאָמוֹ; Eskimos) for Inuit.

71 The one source referenced by Rozolio is James George Frazer's Folklore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend and Law, published 1919. As one of the founding fathers of modern anthropology the Scottish social-anthropologist is known for his evolutionist view of “human belief” which, according to him, originated in primitive magic, replaced by religion, and in turn by science. The book is a comparative lexical study of decontextualised practices from around the world, structured according to the chronology of the Old Testament.
and Hochschild 2014). The imaginary temporal and spatial voyage of Africa Day is multifaceted: what commences as a role-play of Western explorers culminates in the impersonation of Africans in the kibbutz’s avocado or banana groves. The journey through space is simultaneously a journey in time, from the contemporary kibbutz through the liminal yet accessible strata of “Peoples of Nature” to that of the ‘prehistoric man.’ Magal’s version reverses this logic: her journey begins with the physical qualities of the geological and biological earth, moves to prehistoric man and concludes with ‘Peoples of Nature,’ the concrete reality of kibbutz children being the final destination. Both versions seem to imply a connection, a route to nature (as well as a root in nature) in which ‘primitive’ societies are the missing link. In this way, the kibbutz becomes a part of an extended perception of the natural world, through the Peoples of Nature and with them. Since indigeneity is understood within this anthropological and political discourse as a legitimate and inherent connection and title to land, these scenarios serve to construct a utopian cosmology of indigeneity for kibbutz settlers. Its very existence discloses anxieties around pure and just provenance (Wolfe 2002; Veracini 2010).

From a broader perspective, the scientific excursion offers a performed transition from the position of the Jew as an object of the Christian-European, scientific, historical, and anthropological gaze to the universalist humanist subject who possesses and reproduces the knowledge of an other in the service of her own world-making. The special connection of Jews to the social sciences and specifically to anthropology is discussed in depth by the historian Amos Morris-Reich in his study The Quest for Jewish Assimilation in Modern Social Science (2008). Morris-Reich examines ways by which two founding fathers of modern American social science, Franz Boas and George Simmel, were guided or motivated professionally by their Jewish identity and personal encounters with antisemitism. He demonstrates how their influence of ‘the presuppositions which sustain a given form of inquiry, that is, Sociology or Anthropology, reconstituted the “representation of the Jews and the [field’s] understanding of their future”’ (2008: 2). In her study of systems of representation in world fairs and cultural expositions, museum and performance scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett similarly describes how Jews were historically ‘constituted as a subject by scholars, curators, and collectors […] and how scientific and popular displays were implicated in the fight against religious intolerance, racism, and other forms of xenophobia’ (1998: 4). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett exposes nineteenth-century world expositions as a ground for reclaiming an ‘agency of display’, where Jews refused to exhibit themselves in live ethnographic displays, ‘[resisting]
being paraded as a “dime museum freak(s)”’ (5). Alternatively, Jewish ethnographers who assumed managerial positions in museums, such as the Semitic studies expert, Cyrus Adler, deliberately worked to integrate the category of “civilization” – and by that route, Jews – into the Anthropology department at the US National Museum [in order] to avoid subjecting Jews to the ways that “primitive” societies were studied and displayed' (ibid.). Both Morris-Reich and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett outline a common resistance strategy to racialisation and objectification, in which Jews reposition themselves in the favoured end of the primitive-civilised continuum, rather than rejecting it altogether. Like Boas, Simel, and Adler in their time, by playing anthropologists, kibbutz educators have positioned their students (and themselves) on the objectifying side rather than the objectified, both experientially and symbolically, inevitably reinstating the racial objectification of others.

Though the Nations of Nature syllabus included several groups, the enactment of Africa Day seems to have received a special primacy. Pedagogic modules about Africa were a key priority in elementary school education during the 1950s and 1960s in Israel. Haim Yacobi recounts more than ten different textbooks about Africa that were published in Israel between 1952-73. Yacobi finds that these books mostly depict Africa as a continent of starving people and highlight the struggle of African nations against imperial exploitation (2015: 69). The following statement is typical of the recurring message of Israeli/Jewish-African mutuality: ‘the Jewish people have suffered throughout the ages from an excess of history and a lack of geography, the exact opposite can be said of the African continent’ (cited in Yacobi 2015: 69). Documenting the imaginary excursion to Africa with his students, Rozolio narrates the following scene:

we climbed up to the Kilimanjaro’s peak, made our first introduction with the Savannah, with the blacks, [and then] we ‘met’ with the Mau Mau people of Kenya - this, of course, included a friendly conversation over a bonfire in the heart of the jungle where they told us about their struggle for liberation form the burden of foreign rule (1954: 59).

As evident in the texts of Rozolio and Magal, the political affiliation and solidarity with African nations that resisted imperial oppression were integral to the syllabus that informed the performances of Africa Day. In the extended section about Africa in Magal’s text, she points out that in her own class she complemented the introduction to the topic with references to African contemporary politics and to the changes African countries were presently undergoing
(Magal 1969: 22). In comparison, the political situation of Native American communities or Australian aborigines was not part of the programme, thus singling out Africans as contemporaries. While extracting the symbolic and imagery lure of the indigenous groups such as the former two, their settler-colonial context was avoided while an imperial context was elaborated instead.

This special attitude towards Africa in Israeli education of the 1950s and 1960s should be understood as part of a general interest of the Israeli government of that time. Under the auspices of a national sentiment branded as ‘friendship with the African peoples’ and sympathy with their anti-imperial struggles of the time, well-invested diplomatic gestures towards African countries were performed. Those included agricultural and industrial training programmes in more than fifteen Sub-Saharan countries, as well as a continuously growing arms trade (Bar-Yosef 2014: 123; Yacobi 2015: 25). Africa Day hence participated creatively in a discourse amplifying a Janus-faced Israeli position: liberally anti-colonial as well as neo-colonial (i.e. modern). Israel’s foreign minister at that time, Golda Meir, inadvertently expressed this contradiction in her autobiography: ‘We couldn’t offer Africa money or arms but, on the other hand, we were free of the taint of the colonial exploiters because all that we wanted from Africa was friendship’ (cited in Bar Yosef, 2013:124). Kibbutz members who were employed by the government in national projects in different African countries (as Magal did in the 1980s) served as important informants for the performance of Africa Day, often invited to the classroom for a first-hand show-and-tell (Rozolio 58; Magal 22).

Rozolio’s clarification of the nature of the imaginary encounter of his students with Mau Mau warriors – a ‘friendly conversation over a bonfire’ – simultaneously alludes to his acknowledgement of the possibility that such encounter would not have necessarily been friendly. This is hardly surprising given the media coverage of the Mau Mau’s fierce and violent struggle against the British in the 1950s. In Rozolio’s scenario, the Mau Mau do not only accept the children of the kibbutz as their friends, but they reveal their sacred (‘mysterious’) oaths to them, that is, officially accepting them as political allies. The

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72 Yacobi relays on Ronen Bergman (Sirhonot Mefraica 2007) in pointing out that the actual initiators of the Israeli involvement in Africa were in fact security institutions of as Mosad, IDF and, the Ministry of Defence. Their involvement with and service to the government of the USA have also generated much of the funding for the Israeli extensive philanthropy in Africa (Yacobi 25-6).

73 In her book Imperial Reckoning (2005), Caroline Elkins who recorded the history of the Mau Mau struggle in Kenya describe the mystical-dark charge that was attributed to Mau Mau oaths, mainly sustained by their image in British media during the 1950s-1960s).
condescending image of Africans as inherently amicable and their association with children was well reproduced in children’s Hebrew literature of the period, as in the popular *Little Alikama* by Miriam Bartov for example (1949). Children’s performances of Africans ‘visiting’ the kibbutz annually, while reasserting and canonising prejudice and stereotypes in kibbutz tradition, appear to have addressed this greater public interest in an imagined friendship and comradeship with an ‘indigenous African.’

**Cross-dress Race to Transgress Race**

Africa Day was performed by children but directed and staged by adults who seem to have expressed their fantasies and desires through it (as I maintained earlier in relation to anthropological appropriation). These belonged to the first and second generation of mostly Eastern-European settlers in Israel-Palestine, and their performative pedagogic means of racial mimicry emerged immediately after the Nazi genocide of the Holocaust. Therefore, the ideological functions that such activity might have served for them should also be considered against modern discourses of race and racialisation of Jews and their proximity and dialectics with blackness and blacks.

Within the Western discursive dichotomies of race, the position of European Jews was continuously contested. Seminal scholarly figures such as Sigmund Freud (1939) and Edward Said (2003) have theorised the racial instability of the Jew. The anthropologist Sander Gilman’s (1991) classic study of antisemitic constructions of the Jewish body shows how it was often depicted and imagined as black. Gilman describes how:

> the consensus of the ethnological literature of the late nineteenth century was that Jews were ‘black’ or, at least, ‘swarthy’: [Jews’] ‘Blackness’ [...] was not only a mark of racial inferiority, but also an indicator of the diseased nature of the Jew [...], being black being Jewish, being diseased, and being ugly [came] to be inexorably linked [...] indeed, the blackness of the African, like the blackness of the Jew, was believed to mark a pathological change in the skin, the result of congenital syphilis (1991: 171-3).

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74 The myth of friendship with Africa and its rhetoric were recently resurrected around the visit Israel’s Prime Minster to Africa (June 2016), declaring: “I am excited to have arrived to Africa and Africa is excited about my arrival to it” (Benyamin Netanyahu Facebook page 04.06.16. Accessed 20.07.2016).
Gilman also notes in several examples how this scientific discourse was accepted and internalised by Jews themselves. Various scholars have described Zionism as a project of racial recovery, or at least an ‘improvement’, aiming at the whitening of the Jewish body (as studied in the works of Khazzoom 2003; Boyarin 1997; Raz-Krakotzkin 1994). Within the racist reasoning of nineteenth-century scientific-medical discourse Gilman describes, a process of whitening implies a process of healing. In light of this discursive imposition of Jews’ body image, Zionism – and the kibbutz as one of its icons – is to be understood as a revolution in physiological terms no less than in political, national, or ideological ones.

Indeed, ethnic-drag of indigenous peoples is evident in Zionist education in Europe as early as the mid-1920s, as seen in pictures from summer camps of Ha’Shomer Hatzatz’ir youth movement in 1924 (Figure 12).\(^75\) Especially in the immediate aftermath of the 1948 war and

\(^75\) Hashomer Hatzair is the name of the most left-leaning of the several different Kibbutz movements. The use of redface in children’s performance should be read against the popular German ‘Ethnic Shows’ which exhibited people from German colonies and served to simulate colonial frontier-lines for the purpose of anthropological study (Sieg 2009: 125-27). These shows and their like gained immense popularity in Europe and are likely to have inspired Zionist youth-camp organizers to imitate them as an attractive outdoor activity that will assert the normality and health of Jewish youths’ bodies and minds. In
its displacement of Palestinians, Africa Day emerges as a subverted surrogation for the same settler impulse, previously finding its expression in Arabface. A settler’s fantasy for an imagined amicable indigenous population with no land-claims. Within the kibbutz settler-imagination, Africans’ land is seen firstly as far away and, secondly, it is colonised by the same British who ruled Palestine until 1948, a fact that was perceived as a commonality.

Daniel Boyarin highlights Theodor Hertzl’s intention that the act of colonialism would ‘westernize the exilic body of the Jew’ (Boyarin 1997). Following the 1903 proposal of Joseph Chamberlain, the British colonial secretary, to establish a Jewish colony in East Africa (i.e. The Uganda Scheme), Hertzl expressed his hope to form “a miniature and inverse England” in Uganda (cited in Bar-Yosef 2014: 11). Bar-Yosef holds that the opportunity to colonise Africa was seen by early Zionist leaders as a triumphant solution to a Jewish ‘unstable whiteness’ (ibid). Another site of Jewish negotiation of whiteness is explored by Michael Rogin who studied the strong appeal that Jewish American comedians seem to have found in blackface during Hollywood cinema’s first decades (1998). He contends that blacking-up served as a means by which American Jews asserted and consolidated their claim to Americanness: ‘through blackface American Jews exposed the contrasting situations of Jews and blacks that allowed Jews to rise above the people whose cause and whose music they made their own’ (1998: 68). Following Rogin and Bar-Yosef, if blacking-up can be a test of racial whiteness by way of negation, then performing in blackface as Africans (or redface as Native Americans) not only reassured the whiteness of the second-generation Eastern-European kibbutz members, but also redeemed the historically missed opportunity of Zionists to feature Jewish bodies as unquestionably white when juxtaposed with the ‘African’. A photograph archived online by a collector of kibbutz children-culture in which an adult kibbutz member poses with a group of costumed children, dressed herself in a colonial straw hat and white shirt, foregrounds this layer of Africa Day scenarios (Figure 13).

However, according to Rogin, the key motivation of Jews to perform blackface was related to their desire to assimilate in American society as equals. Blacking-up was perceived as partaking in an ‘American’ practice in order to be regarded as Americans by those who were

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76 Founding father of Political Zionism, the dominant strand within the Zionist movement which advocated its manifestation by means of establishing a Jewish nation-state in Palestine (Tesler 2009), Hertzl is considered to be the ideological prophet of the state of Israel.

the kibbutzim of Ha’Shomer Hatzair movement ‘Indians’ Day’ was an educational practice that developed parallel to that of Africa Day in the kibbutzim of HaKibbutz HaMeuchad and shared many of its characteristics.
‘already white’ in America. Beyond an internalised racialising gaze, such parallel address (audience) is difficult to find in Africa Day, given that the reality of the kibbutz did not present a white establishment from whom to seek approval; rather, it constituted it. Nearly from its onset, the kibbutz was the establishment materially and politically, if not ideologically. This gap emphasises the wider question of audience and reception in Africa Day. Family members, interested kibbutz members, and kindergarten children, such as myself, were casually invited to watch Africa Day. However, from both visual evidence and conversations with people who experienced it, the performance (with its educational objectives) did not require spectators in order to take place. Performance studies scholar Marvin Carlson offers that ‘a performance is always a performance for someone […] that recognises it and validates it as performance, even when […] that audience is the self’ (Carlson 2004: 5). Following Carlson, when blackface’s reassurance of whiteness is considered in this context together with Magal and Rozolio’s testimony of the relative participation of the greater kibbutz community in Africa Day, it appears that the racial, ideological, or political validation that was sought through Africa Day was eventually performed (enacted) by the kibbutz community - for itself. It represents an oblique moment of a community playfully dressing-up, indeed dragging-up, in front of a mirror.

Simply asserting ‘whiteness’ was not the only objective of Zionist-socialism's literal approach to unmaking and remaking of race. Parallel to antisemitic texts, as shown by Gilman (1991), early Zionist writings vividly recreated the image of non-Zionist exilic Jews as ‘pale, weak, sickly and cowardly’ (Almog 2007: 132). In this context, whiteness as synonymous with Europeanness was often equated in kibbutz-ideology with ‘paleness’, ‘sickliness’, or worse, (bourgeoisie) ‘middle-class-ness’ (perhaps greyness rather than whiteness). The Zionist-colonial pursuit of ‘Jewish whiteness’ was met with the Soviet-inspired socialist cult of labour and the idealisation of the labouring proletariat body – the negative image of the intellectually-prone bourgeoisie – at the heart of the kibbutz ethos. These two ideological constructions of desired (as well as undesired) physicality sustained somewhat confusing contradictory demands in relation to skin colour.

77 Rogin cites James Baldwin’s On Being White and Other Lies, (1984), where Baldwin asserts: ‘no one was white before he/she came to America. Jews came here from countries where they were not white, and they came here in part because they were not white’ (in Rogin 13).
Zionist socialism often saw itself as a post-European project, one of making the new man who is set up to surpass the West by inheriting all its rights and correcting all its wrongs. If the binary of ‘European’ versus ‘non-European’ is indicated by complexion, then what is the skin colour of a post-European? For early to mid-twentieth-century kibbutz communities who challenged themselves to confront these questions in the most direct empirical ways such liminal space enabled by Africa Day performance could have offered a space that momentarily puts their own race into relief. Under the guise of education, kibbutz members opened a space of playful performance where corporeality is foregrounded (through nakedness) and manipulated (through dyed skin and costume), allowing the illusion that the burdening determinism of one’s race can be unmade, however partially, momentarily and exclusively (for the kibbutz member that is, certainly not for black Africans). Queer theorist Lee Edelman contends that children in modernity come to represent the future (Edelman 2004). Painting the skin of kibbutz children black in the liminal space of groves or orchards thus emerges as a performed act of wishful futurity by means of literal symbolism. A racial fantasy that mirrors the makers’ Jewish desire for a legitimate claim for place in, and connection to, nature entangled with a settler desire for indigeneity, or more accurately, to be native.

Africa Day has not been performed in an organised fashion in kibbutzim for the last twenty years. However, in July 2016 I was sent a video-message from my aunt who still resides in our family’s home kibbutz, showing my eight and six-year-old cousins participating in a summer outdoor activity, titled ‘Brazilian Day.’ The activity was conducted for the kibbutz children on the occasion of the opening of the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. In the video, kibbutz children are dressed in straw-skirts and their guide applies black makeup or mud to their faces. At one point, they are encouraged to run around, hum, and shout. As a third-generation kibbutz member, the guide was clearly citing the performance repertoire accumulated in the kibbutz collective memory around generalised notions of ‘primitive peoples’ (or ‘Nations of Nature’). The striking resemblance of this semi-spontaneous summer camp activity in the kibbutz to the performative devices of Africa Day, and the uncritical use of ethnic drag in an educational setting, highlights the contemporary relevance of a genealogical study to the understanding of

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78 A position most evidently exemplified in the writings of the of Zionist-Socialist philosopher A. D. Gordon (See Almog, 2007).
the crossroads of performance, archive and racism in Israel-Palestine and in settler-cultures at large.

Tilda Death: Vacation in Cape Town

In the summer of 2018, I collaborated with the visual artists Michal BarOr and Avshalom Suliman who curated an archive-based exhibition in the Kibbutz Kabri Gallery (Naheer, Galeria Kabri, June 2018). My conversations with BarOr and Suliman about my study of Africa Day and the Nations of Nature (much of which relayed on findings from Kibbutz Kabri archive) informed their work and, in return, I was invited to create a short performance that responds to the exhibition. This was an opportunity to engage kibbutz members in a conversation about this practice and its legacies through my drag performance of Tilda Death, exploring the intersection of gender drag, ethnic drag, and temporal drag. As a generalised Eastern-European immigrant, an eternal foreigner which does not align herself with Zionism or Israel, Tilda intervenes in the legacies of racial transformation I have discussed above as the phenomenological background for Africa Day performances. She ‘drags ethnically’ by bringing to the foreground something of the conditions of arrival of today naturalised Israeli or kibbutz subjectivities, by impersonating an obliqueness.

In the performance titled Tilda Death Vacation in Cape Town, Tilda re-enacted a familiar trope of kibbutz culture, by which kibbutz members who had travelled abroad give a talk to the kibbutz community and sharing stories and often images (slides) from their journey. Tilda described a long and absurd journey she made on foot from the kibbutz to South Africa, passing several African countries along the way. The images she showed, however, were all of Africa Day performances from the kibbutz’s archive. This playful inversion lead to a fascinating conversation with the multi-generational, predominantly kibbutz-members audience, both during and after the show. I was able to closely witness the process of estrangement in relation to the images so familiar to audience members form their family albums and childhood memories, now recontextualised and problematised. Responses ranged from avid defence and rationalisation of the practice of balking-up as a naïve pedagogical method to shame and embarrassment. Less expected, however, was the rapidness by which the conversation moved to memories and stories of the settler-colonial context of the kibbutz: memory of Palestinians
who were still part of its life in the early 1950s or the violent context of its establishment in the lands of the Palestinian village Al Kabri post-1948. One elderly audience member drew an oblique confusing connection when stating that the use of mimicry of Africans in the teaching of the Nations of Nature was necessary since mimicking Arabs would have been considered ‘racist and insensitive.’ Once suspended in the space of the gallery through Tilda’s drag performance, the obliqueness of the Africa Day images opened up a new mode of perception and conversation. Rather than orientated by a national conflict, the reality of the kibbutz and its history became discernible as produced by and implicated in a complex reality of settler-colonialism. One where performance and education are shaped by incentives to make present certain subjects while disavowing and eliminating others.

The potential of drag performance to generate what I call ‘productive confusion’ in such interventions in settler narratives is the subject of the following chapter. By reflecting on the performance of Tilda Death, I theorise the conditions in which confusion can be productive in acts of decolonisation to the extent that it is able to undermine the policing of lines of perception and to allow to disavowed material to come to the foreground.

Figure 14: Poster image for Tilda Death: Vacation in Cape Town. June 2018, Galeria Kabri. Image by Michal BarOr
In May 2016, I performed my drag monodrama *Life and Times of Tilda Death* in an unusual venue, Beit Halochem (Hebrew: House of the Warrior), a culture and leisure centre catering for disabled veterans of the Israeli army (IDF), on Holocaust Memorial Day. Much has been written about the indispensable symbolic and political role of the legacies of memory of the Holocaust within the context of Israel-Palestine (Gur-Ze’ev 2000; Naor 2003; Kaynar 2013; Nachmani 2016). The discursive power of the Jewish genocide of the Second World War within this debate traditionally and effectively overshadows any claim for recognition in the ongoing ‘spaciocide’ of Palestinians since the beginning of the twentieth century at the hands of Zionism and the killings and transfers in 1947-48, 1967, 1982 and others (Hanafi 2009). In the following chapters I demonstrate how this is manifested both in the kibbutz archive and a kibbutz museum. Although taking place more than half a century after Zionist settler colonialism began in Palestine, the Holocaust is an underlaying means of orienting settler culture away from the reality of settler colonialism. After exploring different appearance of ethnic drag within Zionist settler culture, I turn to my experience of performing in Beit Halochem to reflect on drag’s phenomenological workings in my own performance practice. Due to the unusual circumstances, the autoethnographic account of this experience serves more as an observation in an acentric case study that heightens what otherwise might have been covert, rather than an example to be followed or replicated. Developing the positioning of drag as phenomenological suspension of straightening devices and the ‘presencing’ of the oblique, I explore the notion of confusion (disorientation) as a strategy for intervention in the conventions of Israeli memory culture of the Holocaust, facilitating a momentary ‘surpass [of] the limitations of an alienating presentness’ (Muñoz 2009: 5).
The Way

Saturday morning. I drive with Shir, my producer and stage manager, from Tel-Aviv to Haifa, travelling north along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. We are about to perform my drag-mockumentary *Life and Times of Tilda Death*, which I created with my brother, Neta Weiner, in 2013.79

Appropriating aesthetics typical of testimony-events of Holocaust survivors in Israel as its generic framework, this monodrama relates a fable of a Jewish girl from a small Hasidic community in Poland who became a partisan fighter, musician and rap artist. Tilda’s biography not only goes beyond her activities in the Second World War, but also includes chapters in the Civil Rights Movement of 1960s New York, the Mizrahi Black-Panthers struggle for equality and recognition in 1970s’ Jerusalem and contemporary artistic collaborations with Palestinian musicians in the West Bank. The show oscillates between first-person narrative to spoken-word and rap numbers. Tilda continuously references a wide range of political and cultural figures, from the Red Army commander Gregory Zhukov, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and Mizrahi Black Panther activist Ruven Abergil to Nina Simon, Mick Jagger and the Mizrahi soul diva Margol (Margalit Tzan’ani). All these are woven through her fantastical biography along two parallel trajectories that dominant her life – as well as politics – music and antiracist struggle. In this way Tilda offers an alignment (or alliance) between her experience as a Jewish woman during the Holocaust, to black women in the USA and Mizrahi and Palestinian women in Israel/Palestine. Her politics embodies what the literary scholar Michel Rothberg terms multidirectional memory, recognising the co-constitutive quality of different culture of memory and particularly those of the Holocaust and colonialism (Rothberg 2009). Exploring texts that intersect the memory and commemoration of the Holocaust with those of colonialism and transatlantic slavery, Rothberg contends that ‘multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interaction with others’ (5). Being a drag persona, Tilda reframes the malleable discursivity of collective memory as well as that of gender performativity.

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79 *Life and Times of Tilda Death* is the English translation of the original Hebrew name (Al HaChaim VeAl HaMavet). The protagonist of the show’s Hebrew name is Ada Mavet. Unlike its English translation, the name Ada resonates the Hebrew word ה有助 (Eda), the feminine form of the noun ‘witness’. For the sake of clarity, I use the English translation throughout the text, although the show under discussion was performed in its Hebrew original.
As such, Tilda is often confusing. Theatre scholar Ryan Reynolds builds on Jean Baudrillard’s theory of singularity, in suggesting that the only form of political action available today is to ‘oppose the system by absolute otherness’ (Reynolds 14). For him, the ideal of contemporary political theatre is a ‘moving target’ (ibid), one that can never be fully grasped and therefore cannot be co-opted. Following the philosopher Ernest Bloch, queer studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz advises astonishment as an ‘important philosophical mode of contemplation’ (2009: 5). He theorises this mode of astonishment as one from which relational queer critique can be reclaimed and a queer-utopian can emerge: ‘astonishment helps one surpass the limitations of an alienating presentness and allows one to see a different time and place’ (ibid).

While to Muñoz astonishment pertains to awe, surprise, and admiration, I suggest confusion as a related yet distinguished mode in which the fixation of presentness and, with it, judgment is suspended. Not necessarily, or solely, by constructing a counter-narrative or by dazzling the audience with fabulousness, as by shuffling the very means by which hegemonic memory is signified, expressed and discussed. Confusion of the kind I wish to entertain here is one that targets the audience’s, as well as the maker’s, well-rehearsed mechanism of making (political) sense, and therefore, judge, classify and align. Returning to Ahmed, it is a state of disorientation, where the horizontal and vertical lines of phenomenological space are questioned. In what follows I will reconstruct the way it happened to me and Tilda one Saturday morning in Haifa.

The show consciously appropriates aesthetics and norms of a testimony-event, especially the way it is performed in educational settings in Israel and exports it to the realms of drag and performance art.80 By testimony-event I refer to the occasion of the retelling of personal histories by Holocaust survivors most commonly in schools around the time of Holocaust Memorial Day. In conceptualising testimony-event as a genre of performance, I build on the theatre and performance studies scholar Marvin Carlson who identifies ‘performative attributes

80 I wish to distinguish here the testimony-event from the broad literature on the trope of testimony championed by literary scholars and psychoanalysts such Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and others. After the philosopher Theodor Adorno and with much reliance on the writing of the survivors Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, they theorise the Holocaust as the crises of witnessing and testimony as a universal performative jest of a ceaseless struggle to utter the unutterable (79). This view has been criticised by a number of scholars, some highlighting that ‘testimony is not authentic, egalitarian and universal as it may seem. It is, rather, traversed by power relations, constructed by the government as a spectacle and is abused by it’ (Naissant Bornstein 2016:159. See also Hillman 2015; Givoni 2011; Trezise 2012; Michaelis 2011; Shenker 2015). Although the scope of this text does not allow the due explication of the relevance of this discussion to my work, it is significant to qualify that despite the reliance on video testimonies in the making process of Life and Times of Tilda Death, the work is discussed as testimony only to the extent of its generic frame, indeed its form as an event of performance, and not as a survivor’s testimony.
of mourning, memorialization, and the operations of historical trauma’ (2004: 55). In his work on the Holocaust and postmodernism the literary scholar Robert Eaglestone theorises testimony as a genre, which ‘is not just a way of writing but also a way of reading,’ establishing an ‘horizon of expectations’ (2008: 6, 37). Since these public narrations of testimonies are ritualised as part of the collective culture of memory, they come to bear standardised language, tone and structure, familiar to most graduates of the Israeli educational system. The show draws attention to these ritualised, indeed iconised, aesthetics which normally are naturalise and thus invisible in a usual testimony-event. Tilda wears an elegant black suit and sunglasses, her face is pale with a bold red lipstick and she has a slight limp on her left foot, the reminder of an injury from the days of the war. Her accent is deliberately untraceable, combining elements from Yiddish, German, Polish and Russian. Evocative of yet somewhat exaggerated in comparison to a woman speaker in a testimony-event, these aesthetic devises constitute Tilda as an icon, a reference, and not as mimetic representation. This distance is of course significantly enhanced by the drag.

Today’s show was commissioned by Beit Halochem (Hebrew: House of the Warrior), a culture and leisure centre catering for disabled veterans of the Israeli army (IDF). The cultural events’ programmer of the institute chose Tilda for the annual commemoration event of the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Day. I haven’t performed this show in several months, so while dusting up lines and trying some new puns on Shir, gulping coffee and trying to simultaneously wake-up and warm-up, I contemplate the very unusual circumstances we have got ourselves into.

The Israeli national-historical narrative binds together the commemoration of the Holocaust and Zionism, and the relation between them is fixed in the Israeli calendar. Operating through an implied metaphor of a (collective) journey, the Zionist semi-secular liturgical cycle begins with the festival of Passover and its traditional retelling of the story of Exodus. Holocaust Memorial Day takes place one week after Passover and one week before Remembrance Day for the IDF’s Fallen Soldiers, and Independence Day, that is celebrated the following day. The anthropologist Jackie Feldman summarises this dramatic process thus: ‘World/exilic Jewry [defined through the story of Exodus and is likened to it] is rescued from utter chaos and death (Holocaust Memorial Day), and through self-sacrifice (Fallen Soldiers Memorial Day), raised to the order and life of the State of Israel (Independence Day)’ (2010: 49). Therefore, a critique
of the nationalised memory of the Holocaust for example, is easily labelled a critique of Zionism at large, of Israel’s current policies and actions of the IDF as well as degrading the memory of fallen IDF Soldiers. Tilda’s show in Beit Halochem is scheduled on the Saturday between the two memorial days, right at the heart of the cycle. The challenge of her multidirectional politics of memory and struggle to the hegemonic-nationalist narrative is potentially contentious at any day of the year, and with this particular timing even more so.

It is hard to conceive of a site further removed from the context, discourse and politics that Tilda embodies and in which the show was created than Beit Halochem. Opened in 1985, the impressive six-storey complex is one of four health, sport, and culture centres operated by the The Zahal Disabled Veterans Organization (ZDVO). With around 50,000 members, ZDVO receives several hundred new members to its ranks annually, which include both ex-soldiers who ‘became disabled as a result of or during their activity in the IDF, [as well as] civilian victims of terror’ and their family members’. (ZDVO’s website). Regarding itself as a complementary institute to the Israeli Ministry of Defence (ibid.), the ZDVO is generously funded both by the government and private philanthropists. Judging from the tone and content of its website, the organisation’s centres and their communities are openly aligned with Israel’s national, militarised, patriarchal and heteronormative state ideology.

IDF disabled veterans are somewhat of a paradox within the Zionist able-body and reproduction-favouring attitude, described by the culture-studies scholar Meira Weiss as ‘the ideology of the chosen body’ (2004). Despite being glorified as war heroes, as disabled people IDF veterans are marginalised by a dominant culture that defines itself through idealised notions of able-bodied agency and constructs its social as well as its physical environments accordingly (ibid). The luxurious facilities of Beit Halochem are thus perceived as the just and exclusive reward for those who have sacrificed their bodies – a crucial aspect of their normativity – to the national cause. A fictional figure set-up to undermine nationalistic sentiments, heteronormativity, and hegemonic discourses of national security, Tilda is engineered as the persistent negation of all that is normative: a queer, unaffiliated, non-Zionist, unmarried artist, whose major lesson from her life experience is to always stand opposite to hegemonic power (usually embodied as the national army or police). She is positioned in stark

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81 The majority of disabled members are men and membership model is based on a heteronormative family's structure, in which the spouse and children are the only non-disabled beneficiaries.
opposition to much of what ZDVO and its underlying ideology of glorified national sacrifice may connote. For this reason, the fact that it is Tilda, and Tilda alone, who earned me an entry into this fortified club is all the more bewildering.

The opportunity to acquaint Tilda with an audience unlikely to have attended any of my usual performances was both exciting and nerve-wracking. Once Shir forwarded me Beit Halochem’s invitation email, my first response was to rewrite the brief of the performance, making sure they fully understood what Tilda was all about. As this much more direct, even crude, description of the drag show and its contents did not seem to deter their programmer, I felt compelled to inquire into their vested interest in Tilda. I found out that one of the central activists in Beit Halochem had seen my performance the previous year at the Haifa Theatre. She insisted on it being booked for Holocaust Memorial Day and her judgment was trusted unquestioningly. I did not know the woman nor what her motivations were. This thought did not make me any calmer as the southern neighbourhoods of Haifa came into view from the car window.

It was the first time I had performed this drag-mockumentary so early in the morning, and on a Saturday too. So far, Tilda has performed in different fringe venues, in several galleries, and participated in an outdoor music festival. All these stage appearances occurred between 8 and 11 pm, customary for fringe performances and for drag nights. The bright daylight of late-spring coastal plain road seemed almost blasphemous to the idea of a drag show. Despite the annual midday appearances of drag queens atop trucks in Gay Pride parades in different major cities, bright light is counterintuitive to the practice of drag. Bright light tends to disturb and expose illusions, stiches and tricks, and drag’s modern history in the global north is mainly associated with dark night clubs, side alleys and nightlife (Newton, 1972; Senelick, 2000). Even before beginning to address the unusual setting (site, audience, social context) of the show we were about to perform, the requirement to ‘drag-up’ in broad daylight clearly indicated that both Tilda and I were away from our comfort zones.

82 A similar dynamic is pointed out by the theatre and performance scholar Bryce Lease in relation to RuPaul’s Drag Race: ‘in certain challenges, contestants are asked to walk around on the street, which is positioned – even if implicitly – as the major obstacle of the challenge. Here, drag is framed exclusively as an indoor practice in private or at least privatized spaces intended for performance or performative labour’ (Lease 2017: 139).
A movement from darkness to bright light, from the margins to centre stage, takes place with the practice of drag and its shift to mainstream culture globally. While drag personas such as Lily Savage (Paul O’Grady), Dame Edna Everage (Barry Humphries), Devine (Harris Glenn Milstead) and Madea (Tyler Perry) (however different from one another in style and politics) have featured widely in Anglophone film and television for several decades, RuPaul’s drag reality shows have achieved unprecedented heights of mainstream popularity (Logo TV, VH1; Daems, 2014). Digital broadcasting platforms, such as Netflix, contribute to the global dissemination of the drag-queen trend for both queer and heteronormative audiences, far beyond the US. The growing demand for television drag queens, however, does not imply the embrace of drag as a practice or politics of subversion or transgression, characteristics with which founding queer theorists have linked it (Butler 1991, 1993; Muñoz 1998). The proliferation of popular representation of drag indicates the need for a careful interrogation as to which elements of drag are being embraced and circulated on primetime television and Instagram, and which are edited out. Through reconstructing key moments of my experience with Tilda in Beit Halochem, I will frame few areas in which drag can become a vehicle for political performance-intervention.

The Space

Upon arrival at the gate of Beit Halochem, further incompatibilities present themselves. Feeling a certain embarrassment and reluctance while passing through the gates and into the nearly empty massive building of brutalist architecture, this passage resonates for me with drag’s crossing of categories as well as with acts of trespassing or infiltrating, breaking-in. After a long interrogation by the guards, who did not anticipate our arrival nor seem to understand how the two of us could fulfil the annual slot for the Holocaust Memorial Day event, we are let in. Once inside, we find it very hard to orient ourselves. Our able-bodied logic of stairs and corridors seems to fail us in an alternative topography that privileges wheelchairs, and some time passes before we manage to find our way around.

83 Several scholars have heavily criticised the drag-queen style of RuPaul as heteronormative, misogynistic, and oppressively neoliberal (LeMaster 2015; González and Cavazos 2016; Chernoff 2014; Norris, 2014).
‘If orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies in space’ Ahmed proposes, ‘then disorientation occurs when that extension fails […]. Some spaces extend certain bodies and simply do not leave room for others’ (2006:11). Ahmed’s queer phenomenology initially addresses the incompatibility of queer bodies in heterosexual hegemonic spaces. In this context, inclusion and exclusion – whose bodies’ extension prevails and whose fails – are most heightened though not as neatly organised in binaries or finite opposites. The place itself, which negotiates heroism and privilege of army veterans on one hand, with disability and vulnerability on the other, feels slantwise, oblique. Our obliqueness as outsiders, as people who refused to serve in the army, and as queer subjects are oblique to the space too but as if in a different angle than in any regular settle-heteronormative space. After Ahmed, I attempt to say there was something queer about it.

The technical manager of the institute’s performance space continuously misgenders Shir, insisting on addressing her as a man. His suspicion of us does not seem to allow any negotiation on the matter and so Shir’s identity remains invisible, or in Ahmed’s terms, fails to find room. At the same time, in other ways Beit Halochem has anticipated our arrival beyond our expectations. When we enter the space of the intended performance and are about to lay out the minimal set of the show – a national flag and a memorial candle – we discover that the stage has already been set for us, with more or less the same items.

In the show, the flag and the candle reference the genre of the testimony-event, situating the audience in its context even before Tilda goes on stage. Once there, she is interacting with and commenting on them, thus creating a referential distance between the trope of the testimony-event and herself. Now, the stage of Beit Halochem was all set for Tilda’s testimony-event precisely because there was no theatricality intended on the behalf of the organisers. They had followed protocol and prepared the stage for a standard Holocaust Memorial Day event with its ritualistic objects (i.e. flag and candle). Dramaturgically, this coalescence risked compromising the very difference that sustained the performance as I knew it, the ironic distance between a source and its representation. As a maker and performer, this situation compelled me to rethink the entire premise of the show anew. While taking Tilda’s wig out of its box and brushing it, in my head I tried to re-situate the work, which bears no small measure
of parody and allusion, into a space prepared to perceive it simply as another testimony-event, a thing-in-itself, at face-value and in broad daylight.

**Alliance**

Right when I am done adjusting Tilda’s bra, a woman enters the dressing room. She introduces herself as Maya, the person responsible for commissioning Tilda in Beit Halachem.\(^{84}\) I learn from her that she is a teacher, and that she is linked to the centre through her husband, who was wounded in military service. Maya is also the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, and it was the similarities that she found between Tilda and her mother that moved her the most when she watched the show the previous year. Maya said she was tired of the ‘hackneyed repertoire’ of testimonies that were being commissioned every year by the institute and that Tilda was an opportunity for her to challenge the norm ‘in her own home’. She told me that like Tilda, her mother always rejected the title of ‘survivor’, contending that she never felt ‘survived’, recovered, or compensated. Maya referred to one of Tilda’s lines in the show:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I am not Me. Me was left there, in the pit.} \\
\text{Now only part-ly here, the bare requisite, mere tool.} \\
\text{A parasite on the back of the bull that} \\
\text{crosses a cool river full of horrors and loneliness-ghouls} \\
\text{(Weiner, Life and Times of Tilda Death)}
\end{align*}
\]

Initially, I articulated this standing of the rejection of the trope of survival intuitively, through Tilda’s personality and without any predetermined theoretical agenda. As with the rest of the show’s text, we wrote it as something Tilda ‘would say’, partly based on our grandmothers’ catchphrases and manner of relating to things in the world and partly on the accumulation of Holocaust testimonials we have heard throughout the years. Through Maya’s comparison of this verse to the things her mother says about herself I understand Tilda on a vitally deeper

\(^{84}\) Maya is a pseudonym.
political level. That Tilda should foster such powerful identification, and trust, to the extent that Maya chose her as a representative of her views, and the voice of her mother, in the ideological fort of Beit Halochem, on a contentious occasion such as Holocaust Memorial Day is to me a profound reassurance of the political workings of this project.

Education and literature scholar Lilach Naissant Bornstein discuss what she calls the ‘right and wrong in Holocaust testimonies’ (2016). She contends that even among the survivors ‘the right to speak about the Holocaust is not granted equally, some are allowed more than others […] first are those who went through the hardest suffering and were heroes’ (2016:7). A testimony is not perceived nor heard just on the merit of being a subjective experience of a survivor, but rather is expected to confirm and reaffirm the wider ideological structure in which it is featured (i.e. a national narrative of victory, heroism, and salvation). The historian Susan Hillman warns against the popular tendency to construct the Holocaust ‘mythologically’, whereby it is ‘staged in terms of a morality play, with survivor-heroes ultimately triumphing over evil’ (2015: 216). As the drag persona that she is, and with the mediation and agency of Maya, Tilda sounds unheroic aspects of testimonies, which are being silenced or overshadowed within nationalised memory culture.

On Stage

Backstage, I can hear the members of the audience entering the performance space. As part of the sponsored cultural programme of the centre the performance is free of charge; the audience of Beit Halochem probably does not perceive themselves to be guests, as theatre spectators often do. It is I, and Tilda, who are the guests here, performing in their symbolic collective living room. This seems to alter the economies of power I am accustomed to with this show, as Tilda’s command over her audience, both conceptually and emotionally, usually relies on the premise of them being guests in her testimony-event, her symbolic living-room. I can hear them talk loudly, announcing reserved seats for latecomers. This sense of ownership on the behalf of the audience is new and foreign to me. I find myself worried that Tilda will neither receive the courtesy of suspension of disbelief as a
fictional character, nor tolerance as a drag performer. At the same time, I am not sure that I as a performer deserve such courtesy, knowing how unaware my future audience members are of what is about to come. When I register the atmosphere of gravitas typical of an audience anticipating a Holocaust memorial event, my pre-performance worry turns to full blown anxiety.

Once on stage, the primary audience reaction I encounter is one of attentive confusion: a reluctant willingness to follow through albeit the inability to fully decipher, comprehend or classify. I am alert to various acts of resistance from the audience. Several people leave halfway through, but the clear majority stays and, in varying degrees, delves into Tilda’s stories and spoken-word numbers, laughs at her jokes and engages when she asks questions. One audience member who occupies a seat very close to the stage expresses disapproval and dismay in several parts of the show. As Tilda concludes a story about her injury from a battle against Nazis, by drawing out of her purse a couple of hand-grenades, this audience member shouts at her that she is ‘out of line’ and that she ‘can’t do such things in here.’ I have to agree with him that the use of such graphic imagery in front of an audience with a high likelihood to suffer from battle-related PTSD is not very well thought through. Having said that, I cannot dismiss the fact that even in such a direct, and justified, conflict between Tilda and the audience (over the use of seemingly real hand grenades), the fiction of drag is preserved. Furthermore, it is enhanced through it.

Despite voicing doubts for the need of a performer to enact a role of a survivor in place of a real one (as Shir told me some audience members did), not once during the show was my identity as a woman challenged. As Tilda’s drag is indivisible from her politics of multidirectional memory and anti-racism, through her (fictional) biography, by reproaching her rather than me, the audience member reinforced Tilda’s independent fictional existence and, with it, her political argument, or rather, the political argument she embodies. While I cannot know for sure, I assume that if it had been I performing as myself that morning on the stage of Beit Halochem, with the same ideas that are expressed freely, even flauntingly by

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85 I use the empty cans of tear-gas used by the IDF against Palestinian demonstrators in the West Bank as prop hand grenades.
Tilda, it would not have been long before I would have been stopped and taken off the stage, regardless whether I was a man or woman. Through the confusion she produced, Tilda was able to subvert the policing of accepted narratives, and the taboos that govern a ‘dignified’ or ‘appropriate’ performance space. Tilda, a drag persona, was confusing enough to be listened to.

**After the Show**

One of the few audience members who waited in the space to talk to me after the show was a woman who complimented different aspects of the performance, before inquiring: ‘Why does it have to be a woman? Wouldn’t it have been as good if it was a fictional man in Tilda’s stead?’

At first, I did not find a satisfying answer. Right from her early beginnings, Tilda was conceived as a woman. Beyond foregrounding the ideological alliance of patriarchy and fascism, war and misogyny, what is the significance of the technique of drag in a performance that aims to contemplate alternative legacies of memory and solidarity? Ahmed observes that ‘the etymology of “direct” relates to “being straight” or getting straight to the point. To go directly is to follow a line without a detour, without mediation’ (2006: 16). By leading her audience indirectly, or rather ‘multidirectionally’ to appropriate Rothberg’s term from a literary concept into a dramaturgical one, Tilda Death capitalises on gender, age, and genre ambiguity and acentric politics of unexpected alliances, in securing her audience a space for confusion, before reaching a ‘point.’ This may well be a short-lived window of opportunity, after which the workings of hegemonic discourses subdue and co-opt the effects of confusion. However, when towards the end of the show Tilda recited her version of *Mississippi Goddam*, exclaiming Nina Simone’s words ‘I have been there, so I know,’ a collision of narratives, testimonials, bodies, histories, and struggles came together in what felt to me from the stage like an understanding, a clarity. Potentially something that the anthropologist Victor Turner would call ‘communitas’ (1982), and the performance scholar Jill Dolan would identify as ‘performance utopic’ (2005).

Tilda’s experience with confusion retold here foregrounds means by which drag can be a vehicle and an ally to multidirectional interventions in hegemonic discourses of memory.
Interventions that not only intersect multiple narratives of trauma and remembrance but, by doing so, expose the dialectic and malleable nature of collective memory and memorialisation. This, I find, is not only due to drag’s well theorised (conditional) potential to subvert categories of gender, but also in its capacity to destabilise judgment mechanisms that identify and sustain ideological binaries adjacent to gender, such as race, nation, class and age. After Muñoz, once strategically confusing, drag may allow for public imagining that is beyond a myriad of paralysing presents and foster alternative identifications and alliances.

Figure 15: Tilda Death, Clipa Theatre, Tel-Aviv 2018. Photograph by Eli Katz
PART II

DRAG AND THE SETTLER ARCHIVE
4. CONCEIVING THE SETTLER ARCHIVE

Once understood as an arbitrary accumulation and preservation of official documents by a governing authority, archives today are embraced as ‘the apparatus through which we map the everyday’ (Giannachi 2106: xv). Performance theorist Gabriella Giannachi develops archaeologist’s Michael Shanks’ taxonomy of archives, and recounts five chronologically-consecutive categories of the archive: premodern archives (0.0), passive residues of management (1.0), modern sources of data aware of their capacity to create value (2.0), animated-prosthetic architecture (3.0), and online archives and social media (4.0) (1-25). As evident from this chronological taxonomy, Giannachi suggests that the interdisciplinary study of archives shifts the focus from the archive as a noun (place, institution) to archive as a verb (process, action) (2). This recognition supports the theorisation of archiving processes and mechanisms as tactics at the disposal of society’s refashioning of its self-image. In this chapter I build on Giannachi’s work in retracing processes of archiving that take place in and around the kibbutz archive. Archives assume unique roles within kibbutz life, its collective memory, ideology and identity. Archive institutions have been established in kibbutzim, initially as instruments of management (1.0), later as conscious sources of heritage and the advancement of ideology (2.0) and, as I explore in the next chapter, they are used today in sustaining infrastructures of augmented and digital realities (3.0, 4.0).

Archiving takes place beyond the institution of the archive. While archiving and producing archives, kibbutz culture is also preoccupied with placing itself within an archive, using pre-modern (0.0) archives of Jewish history and religion as a mean to write the kibbutz project into a broad historic-national-ideological narrative. The production of a special version of Kibbutz Haggadah is one pertinent example, where the verses of the Torah and traditional Passover songs are edited side-by-side with contemporary material, modern melodies and the recent occurrences of the kibbutz. In the study by the historian David Jacobson, the annual redrafting of the Passover Haggadah generates an archive that enables a unique angle on historical events, such as the Palestinian resistance to the British during the 1930s (Jacobson 2007). This way, the work of archiving as a method of preservation and conservation with time records information in much wider scope than it was initially intended to. Another practice of archiving prevalent in kibbutzim corresponds with the type of ‘animated-prosthetic architecture’, labelled by Shank 3.0, in the form of memorials and monuments. These are commonly public
commemorations – monuments or specialised rooms (*Hadar Hantzacha*) – archiving the kibbutz’s association with two tropes of memory: fallen soldiers and the victims of the Holocaust. One such example is the stone commemorating the death of my uncle in Kibbutz Hanita, which I discussed in my introduction. Often featuring lists of names and dates and embedded within kibbutz landscape, sites of commemoration index kibbutz community in time and space. Each name usually has a corresponding entry in the kibbutz archive, contextualising a person’s life and death in the general historical residue of the kibbutz. Viewed from the angle of the archive, monuments and sites of commemoration appear as an extension and exteriorisation thereof. They are all included in the apparatus of each individual kibbutz archive, partaking in its function as a memory-machine and orientation-device where, as Giannachi indicates, archives, museums, monuments and memorials are growingly understood as ‘fluid’ and ‘interchangeable’ (64).

Yet, a critical quality that I know from the kibbutz – its life, culture, and legacy – cannot be expressed through the taxonomy of archives presented by Shank and expanded by Gianacchi. For example, when driving past the big yellow gate in the fence that surrounds Kibbutz Giva’at Haim, to the left stands the kibbutz’s cowshed. Growing up there, I learned to recognise the cowshed as a source of identity and pride, as it was the biggest and most productive in Israel. It was not before my teens that I became aware of the fact that the cowshed is located on the lands of the Palestinian village Manshiya. Manshiya’s lands share a similar fate with many other lands of Palestinian villages, which were handed to kibbutzim immediately after the 1948 Nakba, upon the displacement of their inhabitants (Morris 2004). Tomer Gardi is an Israeli writer, who grew up in Kibbutz Dan of the Upper Galilee. In his book *Stone, Paper* (2011) he traces the story of the kibbutz’s natural-history museum or, more precisely, the story of the stones that construct its building.86 These are the stones of the houses of the Palestinian village Hoonin that was evacuated and destroyed in 1948. Unlike these two kibbutzim that existed prior to 1948 (Giva’at Haim was established in 1932 and Dan in 1939), Kibbutz Kabri was founded in 1949 on the lands of the Palestinian village Al-Kabri (Near 2007). When asked about the origin of the kibbutz’s name, my mother and her classmates referenced the name Kabrita, a place of settlement that is mentioned in the Talmud and other historical records (archive) from the period of the Second Temple (starting 538 BC). No connection was made to the old mysterious stone construction which they called Beit HaSheich (house of the Sheikh),

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86 I discuss this work in depth in Chapter 5 as a case study for decolonising interventions in kibbutz archives.
where generations of kibbutz children used to play. The artists Michal BarOr catalogued and exhibited different items such as a big wardrobe, and decorated tiles from across Kibbutz Yad-Mordechai, that were left behind by Palestinians who fled their fields, which today are cultivated by kibbutz members. These are all examples for an archive cohering in the accumulated impressions left by the Palestinian villages that until 1948 existed on the lands that today form part of the kibbutz, one that takes place outside and alongside kibbutz archive and official practices of archiving.

The memory of these villages and their people is preserved in the kibbutz landscape, etched on its collective memory and, therefore, archived in and through them. Remains of Palestinian stone-houses that are re-used for different purposes in many kibbutzim are one manifestation of this. Other manifestations are official narratives of kibbutz history in which Palestinians feature as bitter enemies or long-gone friendly neighbours as well as unofficial rumours about the violence and pillage of 1948. Phenomenologically, it is these aspects of landscape, history, and memory which are edited out of the settler’s ‘mirror in the ground’ (Shepherd 2015), relegated to the background, covered by the performance of settler identity. The kibbutz archive’s unsupervised documentation and preservation of the kibbutz chronologies paradoxically enables and sustains Palestinian presence, which is normally repressed and formally disavowed. I perceive the two archive-formations – that of the institute of the kibbutz archive and that of the unintentional and covert archive of Palestinian presence – as positioned on opposite sides of the inherent paradox between archiving and settler-colonialism, sustained through the tension this paradox generates and by each other. In this chapter I consider the development and function of the kibbutz archive and the mechanisms and practices (as much as the lack thereof) that allowed, or enabled, the archiving of indigenous Palestinian existence despite and against the grain of settler-colonialism. It is these paradoxical characteristics that defined a settler-archive, as opposed to the colonial, or the state archives.

The Settler-Archive Paradox

The term ‘Settler Archive’ is a paradox, perhaps even an oxymoron. Political theory of settler colonialism asserts that settler projects aspire to eliminate their colonial characteristics (Coulthard 2014; Veracini 2010; Wolfe 1999). This largely involves a selective disavowal of
the past, particularly in relation to the presence of and relations with indigenous communities. Therefore, the idea of an archive that documents the chronicles of the settler colony is potentially at odds with the objectives of colonisation and the endurance of a stable narrative of the settler body-politique. Theory of settler colonialism does (however partially) account for this apparent contradiction, highlighting the necessity and utility of archiving to the settler project. Yet the process of archiving remains a double-edged sword when settler-disavowal is understood as an ongoing effort necessary to colonisation.

The kibbutz is simultaneously a technique and product of settler-colonialism, where historically and structurally the kibbutz-project predates the state of Israel and is also part of it. I consider the kibbutz separately from the framework of the Israeli nation state and its establishments, in tandem with the assumption that national frames of analysis routinely work to undermine and obscure settler-colonial realities, as I discuss in my introduction. This position is also in line with the work of Sabagh-Khuri on Palestinian cultural history in kibbutz archives. Sabagh-Khuri’s research explicitly shows that ‘kibbutzim established an exclusive society that was distinct from its surroundings’ and despite celebrating socialist principles of bi-nationalism ‘played a central role in a colonisation process that turned large portions of Palestinian land into sovereign Jewish territory’ (2014; 2016: 1, 4).87

The colonial archive is usually understood as the ‘empire’s archive’, the kind which is studied by anthropologists such as Ann Stoler (2010), or the ‘(post)colony’s archive’, famously studied and theorised by the political philosopher Achille Mbembe (Mbembe 2002, 2001). By this I refer to the archives that consist of the records of a European metropole’s administration of and the relationship with an imperial outpost (Stoler), or of the records of a government administration that was established in its place post-independence (Mbembe). I argue that the kibbutz archive poses a different set of variables which distinguish it from both these types and, therefore, calls for a methodological reconsideration. Being implicated in the ongoing process of settler-colonisation, the kibbutz archive cannot be treated as ‘the bitter aftertaste of the empire’ (Stoler 2010: 19). Compared with the wide-ranging research of colonial and

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imperial archives and with the more recent interest in diasporic archives (Giannachi 2016: 93-113), settler archives are largely under-studied as such.\textsuperscript{88}

An underlying question here therefore must be what is a ‘settler archive’ and how it is to be understood distinctly from the colonial or nation-state archives. One approach to the emergence of the modern archive is found in Victorian Britain where the imperial project motivated archival practises that supported the mapping, consolidation, and administration of the colonies (Giannachi 2016: 1, 8). This imperial archive is characterised by an uncritical claim for universality, and as such is open and accessible. The knowledge generated by the imperial impulse of archiving was later curated in cabinets of curiosity and, later, museums, serving to educate the public (Marstine 2005: 36–37). In a similar stance, as demonstrated by Sabbagh-Khoury (2014), the active production and archiving of knowledge in early phases of the kibbutz’s settler project was founded on the gathering of intelligence on the Palestinian population. Sabagh-Khuri describes how in most kibbutzim specialist Arabic-speaking members were responsible for developing relationships with neighbouring Palestinians communities, locating informants, and passing information to the kibbutz leadership or to the Zionist institutions (ibid).

Unlike the Victorian imperial archive, however, this knowledge was marked as classified and sensitive, one that due to its importance to the advancement of colonisation and security of specific settler-communities is deemed secretive and inaccessible to the public. I propose that this aspect of the ‘archive as classified’ endures in the settler mind-set of kibbutzim long after the work of intelligence-gathering was nationalised by the military and after kibbutz archives started to revolve around mundane documentation of inconspicuous meeting-protocols of kibbutz committees, records of agricultural and industrial revenue, and documentation of educational and cultural activities. This split between the classified-hidden wing of the archive and that of the official and openly celebrated one is not only a defining feature of a settler-colonial archive, but it also allows to structurally disavow those aspects of kibbutz history and present that do not coincide with settler self-image, while continuing to preserve their testimonies unharmed. Phenomenologically, we may say that this split is what enables the archive as an orientation-device, regulating the movement of data, narratives, and affects from

\textsuperscript{88} A notable exception to this rule is E. Cram’s study of ambiance and sensory memory in the settler colonial archive in the United States (Cram 2106), although they do not address the formal specificity of a settler archive.
the foreground to the background. Simultaneously, this structure can potentially lend itself to decolonising effects, given that the movement of documents in the opposite direction is as possible.

The Double-Lining of the Settler-Archive

Veracini observes two particular areas of settler disavowal. One is the disavowal of founding violence. He relates the need to repress any founding violence of the settler colony to the settlers’ desire to imagine and represent the colony as ‘ideal and utopian’ (2010: 77). Any violence that took place during the establishment of a settler colony will be reconfigured in the settler’s national discourse as an ‘unavoidable defensive battle ensuring the continued survival of the settler community’ (2010: 78). The generative historical ethos of Giva’at Haim revolves around a conflict with the British Mandate over uncertified immigration to Palestine that lead to 24-hours siege on the kibbutz (1945). In Kabri and Yad-Mordechai the founding myths are associated with the evacuation of their kibbutzim in 1948 after they were taken by the Jordanian and Egyptian army respectively. The second element of disavowal typical of settler colonialism is of the very existence of a native population. As discussed before, ‘settler projects are recurrently born in a perception of emptiness’, according to which a *terra nullius* was anticipating its salvation by the settler (2010:82). The three aforementioned stories leave no space or trace to the existence of the Palestinian villages at the kibbutz vicinity which were not there anymore after 1948 (in Giva’at Haim and Yad-Mordechai) or on which land the kibbutz settled after the war (as in Kabri).

The phenomenological implication of this mind set is that while land grab and displacement of native populations are constantly underway, they cannot be perceived and, therefore, cannot be represented in discourse. Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor has offered the term ‘percepticide’ to describe a kind of mentality that ‘by positioning our perspective [...] promotes certain views while helping to disappear others’ (1997, 2003: 28). Michel Foucault’s theorisation of the archive as ‘the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events’ is central to this view (1969: 129). Both Taylor and Foucault mark the archive as the selective mechanism through which both speech and vision are enabled and, therefore, as central to processes of ‘presencing’ or disappearance.
Giannachi’s work reiterates this position in stating that ‘archives have always, to some extent, operated as presencing tools' (2016: 12). Mbembe names this quality which he too deems an ultimate role of the archive, ‘instituting imaginary’ (2002: 19). It is through this multivalence of theory that we come to understand the archive as an ‘orientation device'. In Taylor’s work on the disappearance of political activists in Argentina during the Dirty War years, as with Palestinian communities in Israel-Palestine, ‘percepticide’ coincides with and facilitates the corporeal elimination of people. Viewed in this way, the archive is not only not contradictory to settler-colonial logic but serves as an important asset to the operation of settler colonialism due to its capacity to negotiate unwanted evidence and sustaining disavowal. Queer studies scholar E. Cram, who writes on the settler-colonial archive in the American West, supports this view, stating that ‘perception becomes a resource for the process of remembering and forgetting’ (2016: 116).

This split in settler consciousness embodied in and through the archive can be observed and historicised in what otherwise might be regarded as a curious historical timing to set up archives. In reflecting on his work in and experience of the kibbutz archive, Gardi discusses an official letter that was issued by the general secretariat of Hakibbutz Ha’arzti movement to order the establishment of archives in each of its kibbutzim. The letter was sent in June 1948, during the temporary truce of the 1948 war. By that time, many of the kibbutzim had already existed for about three decades and some of them had already developed some kind of archiving practice. However, it is in this historical moment when violence against Palestinians is at its peak and, therefore, their existence is more undeniable than ever before, that the need for an archive arises with urgency. The letter explicitly attributes the exigency of the need for an archive to the events of the war. It invites the kibbutz members to: ‘nurture [their] sense of history, to appreciate every note, written instruction, order, diary, journal, a letter of kibbutz member, photograph etc., and to collect them carefully and diligently, [acknowledging that] one day according [to these documents] the pages of history will be written’ (Gardi 2011: 12). The letter goes on to instruct the official appointment of a kibbutz archivist to whom the kibbutz members should be of assistance (ibid). This specific qualification demonstrates the willingness to allocate the labour of a kibbutz member as well as kibbutz infrastructure and resources for the task of archiving during what is allegedly a pressing time of defence and

89 Hakibbutz Ha’arzti is one of the two big kibbutz movements in Israel; The letter was published in full in the work of Tomer Gardi Stone, Paper (2011), 10-12.
austerity. More than the pathos in the style of its register, this fact appears to testify to the importance placed by the kibbutz leadership upon archiving.

How can this act in which the kibbutz insists on documenting and preserving the very events that (as Veracini would at least claim) it must disavow as a settler colony be understood? One possible reading of this administrative move can be related to Mbembe’s understanding of national archiving practices as attempting to ‘consume time’ (2002:23). The urgency expressed by the kibbutz authorities could have been motivated by the premonition that the durability of the new geopolitical reality attained through military actions depends on the ability to re-contextualise and narrativise these actions in the future. Wolfe observes that since Zionism is one of the latest settler-projects, it was able to learn from the experience of more senior projects (such as Australia, USA, Canada, Peru or Brazil) to avoid tactical mistakes and adopt successful strategies (2012). Another implication of its relative nascence is that unlike older settler projects that were born in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Zionism is perceiving itself answerable to the world’s anti-imperialist critique and rejection of colonial violence, which grew evermore strongly at the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Therefore, in a world where the United Nations attempts to impose a liberal universal code of conduct, the ability to control narrative through evidence can have not only internal identitarian and ethical importance but also an external, legal, and political one. In the long run, however, the unselective collection of evidence and their habitual preservation in the kibbutz archive complicates the command over the exclusivity of the narration of history and contextualisation (interpretation) of violence.

A different explanation may turn to Veracini’s idea of the inherent narcissistic tendencies of settler societies, which lead to an obsessive preoccupation with self-documentation and representation, regardless of pragmatic or political consequences, a kind of settler-colonial hubris. Veracini contends that within settler identity and ‘in contradiction with other political entities, a Freudian type of ego-ideal formation is […] at play, where the narcissistic idealisation of the ego and identification with the parents (“the motherland”) come together in representations of the settler entity as both an ideal society and as a truer and uncorrupted version of the original social body’ (2010: 77). The active role of the kibbutz in volunteering itself (as an organisation or community) and its members to be the subject of academic-scientific research which I describe in Chapter 1 can be seen as one expression of settler-
narcissism. Another is the process by which violence becomes a part of settlers’ image and even though it is strategically inadequate to preserve its records, settler societies cannot depart from the image by disposing of them.

Either way, the outcome of archiving the events of 1948 War as part of the kibbutz chronology leaves a trace, the presence of which could potentially make the labour of disavowal more difficult. It is especially so, since kibbutz archive is far from being a unified system with a standardised conduct, regulation of material distribution, or censorship. In individual kibbutz archives, the familial and personal is indivisible from the collective and the national, creating large grey areas in matters of legitimacy of access to documents and the kinds of use they would serve. At the same time, the kibbutz movement’s central archives are closer in form and style of operation to the national archives. However, the movement of material from individual kibbutz archives to the central archives or to the state archives is largely a matter of individual decision-making of archivists in either of them, heavily reliant on personal friendships. In light of the paradox of settler archive, I now turn to map and analyse the structural apparatus of the kibbutz archive.

The Structural Non-Structure of Kibbutz Archive(s)

The challenge of controlling subversive contents that accumulate in the kibbutz archive is not only an historical or conceptual one but also one that emanates from its organisational structure. Turning to outline the structure of kibbutz archive(s), I argue that despite the danger of opening itself to subversions, what can appear as an inefficient Kafkaesque structure in fact serves settler interests of disavowal and self-obfuscation. The kibbutz archive is constructed out of several semi-connected units, which in fact encompass one archive. The Archive Network of the Kibbutzim and Social Zionism includes four large collections, which recently came together to create a joint digital catalogue and partial depository of visual materials (Israel Archives Network). Two of these are the main administrative archives of the kibbutz movement: Yad Ya’ari of the Kibbutz Ha’Artzi and its settlement movement Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza’ir, and Yad Tbenkin of the TAKAM and its multiple settlement movements. The other two

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90 This was done as part of the 100th anniversary of the kibbutz movement in 2011 (source: www.kibbutzarchives.org; Accessed March 15 2017).
are the result of special subject-oriented projects carried by individual kibbutzim, one is dedicated to the Holocaust and the Second World War (Moreshet) and the other to the cultural legacy of the kibbutzim (Shitim).

It is worth noting that both the themes to which the kibbutz dedicates a specialised archive – kibbutz culture and the memory of the Holocaust – directly participate in and perpetuate disavowal of Palestinian presence. As discussed in my chapter on Africa Day performance, kibbutz culture was consciously developed as a means to fulfil the cultural and spiritual void faced by its pioneers after turning their backs on the Jewish Eastern-European traditions of their families. This notion of a void coincided and merged with the settler mission of reshaping a terra nullius, ‘making the desert bloom’ (Veracini 2010: 82). Therefore, the innovative cultural production of the kibbutzim is registered in this context as the fulfilment of a void, creating new life in an empty space where no civilisation existed before.91 I have discussed in the previous chapter the place of institutionalised memory of the Holocaust in silencing and disavowing settler-violence and in perpetuating victim consciousness within Zionist settler culture. In the next chapter, I demonstrate how this is manifested spatially in kibbutz museums.

Apart from this both privately and state-funded network of official archives, the Israel Archive Network registers no fewer than 104 kibbutz archives, located in individual kibbutzim. Several archives on this list are subject-oriented initiatives of individual kibbutz members, covering such areas as film (Mishmar Ha’Emek) or architecture (Beit Ha’Emek) (Israel Archives Network). The majority are archives operating in kibbutzim as an integral part of their administrative and communal development. However, today in Israel there are 274 kibbutzim, which implies the potential existence of 170 more archives. These are currently uncharted by the Israel Archive Network and are privately managed by their respective kibbutzim.

This decentralisation has multiple consequences, not only on the standardisation of operation but also on the possible efficacy of monitoring and regulating the work of the kibbutz archive and the control of access to its contents. Firstly, this concentric structure creates uneven degrees of institutional monitoring and surveillance. For example, my visits to the Yad Tabenkin archive necessitated the signing of a form, which restricts my use of the archival

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91 While the research on early cultural activism in kibbutzim focuses on the legacies of and breaks from Eastern-European Jewish tradition, the meanings and implications of its non-encounter (ibid) with local Ottoman-era Palestinian culture are overwhelmingly understudied.
material and obliges me to acknowledge the archive in any future publication. The request for material was conveyed via email to the archivist, based on my search in the digital catalogue online, and the specific request was handed to me for photocopying in the presence of the archivist. No direct access was permitted to any part of the collection save from the digitalised material online. This was approximately the same as my experience in each of the big national archives in Israel.

In comparison, the visit to two individual kibbutz archives was radically different. In the archive of Giva’at Haim I met with the archivist, who briefly inquired on the phone about my interest prior to my visit and upon my arrival handed me several documents, which he assumed would be of interest to me. When inquiring about a catalogue of the archive’s inventory, I was handed a portable hard drive with the digitalised depository of the kibbutz’s newspaper, containing copies that date as early as 1934 and as late as 1992. On the one hand, my physical proximity to the contents of the archive was far greater than in Yad Tabenkin; on the other hand, my ability to engage with the contents was highly limited by my inability to access a catalogue. My visit to Kibbutz Kabri archive presented another kind of experience where, again, no forms were required. There, following a short texting exchange, the archivist had generously prepared a pile of documents for me, welcomed me in and then left me on my own for several hours. While no catalogue was to be accessed (similarly to the experience in Giva’at Haim) I was completely free to engage with any item. Although a myriad of different factors could have accounted for this difference in attitude, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the presence of the Giva’at Haim archive on the list of Israel Archive Network and Kabri’s absence from it.

Decolonising Kibbutz Archive?

On the one hand, the dispersed structure of the kibbutz archive evident in the different approaches that I encountered in the three archives pose real difficulty for what Azoulay terms (after Derrida) ‘archive gatekeeping’ (2014). That is, the monitoring of access to archival material. On the other hand, it is within this structure that I identify a strategy of settler-colonial logic to eliminate the traces of settler-colonialism. The fragmentation of the multiple collections that together comprise the kibbutz archive allows for the obfuscation of the nature
of the kibbutz movement as a technology of settler colonialism. As expounded in Near’s comprehensive and recent historical account of kibbutz history, the kibbutz movement acted as an organised ideological body from its onset and as such all its settlements were created out of a deliberate and well calculated strategy. The haste in which new kibbutzim were founded during the weeks that followed the truce agreements of 1948 as well as in 1967 (in Sinai, the Golan, and the West Bank) is an adamant indication of it. As long as the kibbutz archives are thought of and treated as dispersed and disconnected, the markers and evidence for the gradual disenfranchisement of Palestinian communities (before and after 1948) can be deemed local, exceptional and abnormal. In this situation, the self-proclaimed settler myth of the kibbutz as a peaceful, socialist humanist project that turned an underdeveloped and empty (uninhabited) land into a haven of modern agriculture, industry, and progressive communal life can be performed, nearly unperturbed. Integrated into the nationalist culture of Zionism and Israeli sovereignty, any local reference to violence between the kibbutz community and neighbouring Palestinian communities is attributed to a national act of self-defence (war of independence) and inevitable evil, stripped of its local context and detached from the kibbutz idiosyncratic ontology. Accordingly, its documentation is easily classified as sensitive, justifying the denial of access to it.

Consequently, any claim for recognition in past atrocities, rights for land or property is deemed impossible. The kibbutz can thus perform in the eyes of itself, in front of its mirror-archive, an ideal utopia in which Palestinians do not exist, or ever existed. The kibbutz settler (as much as kibbutz leaders and politicians) thus enjoys the affirmation of pure and just provenance and the sense of historical importance projected from the local archive without confronting (indeed disavowing) the historical and political consequences of the transformation of geopolitics in Israel-Palestine, emblematised by its very existence. This point is crucial for the kibbutz’s own self-perception as a progressive and peace-seeking entity in Israel’s political and social discourses. Furthermore, as a cherished historical icon of Zionist settlement at large, this obfuscation is of ideological importance to and in the interest of Israeli society at large (Libman 2012; Omer-Sherman 2011). The present symbolic and political position of the kibbutz in current Israeli public discourse presents an additional complexity. The association of the kibbutz with the legitimacy of Zionist settlement is so predominant and deeply entrenched that even when today the kibbutzim are being widely criticised for their privileges and condescending separatism, especially by Mizrachi activists, the centrality of the role of
the kibbutz in the displacement of Palestinians and the inheritance of their lands is rarely brought up by any political party or group on the Israeli political spectrum.

The acknowledgment that both monitored, centralised, and marginal ‘uncharted’ archives belong to one apparatus (Giannachi 2016: xvii) is an initial step towards the decolonisation of kibbutz archive(s). It allows for a relational reading of kibbutz archives, perceived contextually, as ‘inter-archives’ (ibid). This will enable charting, charging, confronting, and debating fundamental patterns of displacement and dispossession of Palestinian communities at the hands of the overarching kibbutz project. In turn, this may expose and reframe the liability of individual kibbutzim to the displacement of Palestinians. For this reason, my analysis of the kibbutz archive adopts Giannachi’s approach for the study of the archives as apparatus, acknowledging its capacity to ‘produce [its] own subjects’ and its (declared or disavowed) aim ‘to govern and direct thoughts and actions of people’ (ibid). An inclusive depiction of the process of displacement will simultaneously produce a counter archive, revealing the contours and extent of that which was, and is, continuously erased.

The archiving practices of the kibbutz settler archive leaves a trace, the presence of which could potentially make difficult the labour of disavowal. It is this trace of the archive that when joined by the impression of the emptied Palestinian villages inscribed on the kibbutz landscape and collective memory creates a counter-archive. This is the counter-archive that enables Sabag Khuri to study Palestinian cultural history in the archives of Kibbutz Hazorea. It is a counter archive not in the sense of an archive established deliberately to speak out alternative minoritarian voice of marginalised or denied histories, that of the postcolonial kind. The ‘counter’ of the kibbutz settler archive coheres in its negative spaces. It is information, testimonies, and relics of Palestinian life that are indecently and unintendedly – but at the same time inevitably – inscribed in the kibbutz. The following chapter develops the potentials and repercussions of drawing attention to these negative spaces in kibbutz archives and to the way that they interfere with the kibbutz landscape.
5. LANDSCAPE DRAG
Performing the Kibbutz Settler Archive

Dragging-up landscape serves here as a metaphor for the consideration of the workings of archives in the locale of the Israeli kibbutz, describing their performance through memory and space as interruptions to repeated lines of the perception of landscape. Archaeologist Christopher Tilley who pioneered the poststructuralist approach to the combined study of geography and arachnology cautions ‘not to forget that the contemporary term 'landscape' is highly ideological’ (Tilley 1994: 24). Building on but differing from theorists who define landscape descriptively as 'a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings' (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988: 1, cited in Tilley 1994: 24), he acknowledges landscape as an experience, necessarily dependent on the experiencer. He therefore attends to the phenomenological study of landscape through the notion of ‘locales,’ described by him as ‘places created and known through common experiences, symbols and meanings […] Locales may offer a distinct quality of being inside, or part of, a place’ (18). Landscape is therefore a ‘setting in which locales occur and in dialectical relation to which meanings are created, reproduced and transformed’ (25). This relation that Tilley establishes calls for the understanding of topographical formations, fauna and flora as constitutive of culture, ideology, and memory in a given locale. Read with Ahmed, as the relations and networks are established through repetition and over time until they are naturalised and relegated to the background, landscape itself is a line, or systems of lines of perception, both orientated and orients.

The case studies I explore in this chapter use visual, tactile, and textual documents from kibbutz archives to perform different interventions on the level of the perception of landscape constructed in settler locales. I think of them as performing landscape drag in order to highlight aspects by which they bring into view landscape’s conditions of arrival. Each in its own way simply asks: ‘how did this place come to be?’ and the very gesture of the inquiry sets in motion phenomenological chain reactions, disturbing mechanisms of disavowal and uncovering denied realities. While in some of the interventions the implications are symbolic or discursive, in others they travers the material and corporeal realms of human interaction. Their comparative study here serves to retrace each of their strategies and context in order to articulate conditions of decolonisation with and through the archive. On a different yet concurrent level, I consider here the way by which settler societies utilise archival material
(and the institution of the archive) as adornments. That is, as concrete as well as metaphorical artefacts that are used through curating and installing (in space) to complement a desired ideological image of the colony through its landscape. While reflective, reaffirming qualities are well theorised as a fundamental trait of any contemporary archive (Derrida 1995; Foster 2004; Giannachi 2016), I am interested in the specific ways in which these dynamics facilitate – both directly and implicitly – the disavowal and erasure of indigenous presence.

‘Living Archive’ is the name of an archive-based project in Kibbutz Giva’at Haim, in which photographs are placed throughout the kibbutz landscape. In this example, landscape is dragged-up not by architecture or infrastructure but through storytelling and re-narrativising. Intended as a gesture of strengthening hereditary-lines (‘connecting new generations to the history of the place’) and collective legacies of the kibbutz, the positioned images simultaneously denaturalise the mundane, every-day experience of kibbutz life by theatricalising its landscape. This first example complicates the binary understanding of drag as a decolonising action and demonstrates how suspension and resistance to straightening devices is as much a part of sustaining settler-colonial relations and identities as it may serve to expose and resist them.

The second case study is Stone Paper (Gardi 2012), a multivalent composition dedicated to the confrontation of a kibbutz-born Israeli with his native-kibbutz history of settler-colonialism through the archive. Writer Tomer Gardi experiments with various genres of writing in order to capture both the implications of the knowledge he excavates in the archive and their affective residues while, simultaneously, he reflects upon his own positionality. In what appears in the formatting of the book’s sections as a desperate final attempt to ‘make sense,’ towards the end he resorts to writing a short play, titled Siman. I read Siman to unpack the use of archival material by a settler subject as an inverse, critical mirror; one that reveals and re-presence. I am particularly interested in the way Gardi’s text is oriented around his position of a settler that uncovers difficult histories of settlement and the limitations this position imposes on trajectories of resisting or suspending straightening-devices of settler colonialism. The play serves a productive example here not only from the perspective of the deployment of settler-colonial theory in the study of drama, but also due to the dramatisation of a conversation as a device that potentially challenges Gardi’s book’s overarching self-referential (self-oriented) tone.
Abandoned Property is the title of an art exhibition created by the artist Michal BarOr and curated by Ravit Harari, for Dana Gallery in Kibbutz Yad-Mordechai, between May to July 2016. BarOr assembled and juxtaposed various objects which once belonged to Palestinians and presently are part of the kibbutz, such as bronze trays that were found in the kibbutz’s fields and traditional Arabic floor tiles hidden under a carpet. BarOr’s work included a series of conversations with kibbutz members who commented on her work and its themes, but despite initial intentions, the recordings of these conversations were not included in the final exhibition. I reflect on BarOr’s use of Palestinian objects that are ‘archived’ in the kibbutz throughout the years of its existence (as opposed to being intentionally archived as such), and their conflation with other symbolic objects that reference negative space. Through listening to BarOr’s recordings of the conversations she conducted in the gallery with kibbutz members, I outline the extent and limitations of developing discourse of decolonisation through the kibbutz archive in and through kibbutz communities.

The three cases exemplify three parallel techniques – museological, literary-dramaturgical and that of visual art – for the phenomenological work that is enabled through the kibbutz archive, as pertaining to its attributes as a settler-archive. By comparing the kibbutz-initiated Living Archive with the two artistic interventions of Siman and Abandoned Property, I problematise totalising assumptions about both colonising and decolonising actions that involve archives and their material. Already oblique, kibbutzim and their settler-archives can be transformed and utilised as shared resources for collaborative, reparatory, decolonising projects. This will require offering themselves for the recovery of the preserved, yet unmarked, Palestinian presence that is stored within them and, by this, to open up new directions for recognition, reparation, and restorative justice.
Figure 16: The map of the Living Archive project in Kibbutz Giva’at Haim. The numbers in the yellow boxes indicate the locations of the different photographs and the order (direction) in which they are to be visited. Translation of text in the top image: ‘The map of the location of sign-posts at the parking-lot. A box attached to the map contains leaflets of the map and minimised images of the photographs from the kibbutz’s history.’ Translation of the text in the bottom image: ‘Living Archive – Following the Footsteps of Pioneers. 80th Anniversary for Giva’at Haim.’ Image and text are sourced from the ‘Living Archive’ page (יח''וןיכרא) in the Archive section (ןויכרא) of the website of Kibbutz Giva’at Haim (accessed January 2019). Photographer unknown for all living archive images.
The Living Archive is an outdoor exhibition of historical photographs, inaugurated in Giva’at Haim to commemorate the kibbutz’s eightieth anniversary (2013). Twenty pictures that were selected from the kibbutz’s archive were framed in protective plastic and positioned in the approximate site of their realisation. The pictures face the original angle in which they were taken, which encourages the comparison between ‘then’ and ‘now,’ framing the transformation of landscape that took place during the past eighty years of settlement and development as bewildering and magical. Its starting point is marked by a large map welcoming those arriving from the kibbutz’s main car park to the path leading to the dining hall (Figure 16). Initially, maps are instruments of orientation. The notion of the ‘deep map’ is developed by performance theorist and practitioner Mike Pearson and archaeologist and geographer Michael Shank in their interdisciplinary exploration of interfaces of theatre and archaeology.

Reflecting eighteenth-century antiquarian approaches to place which included history, folklore, natural history and hearsay, the deep map attempts to record and represent the grain and patina of a place through juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional, the discursive and the sensual; the conflation of oral testimony, anthology, biography, natural history and everything you might ever want to say about a place (2001:64-5; see also Giannachi 2016: 34-5).

As deep map concerns the cross-section of the material-topographic with the discursive and the affective in the formation of a place, the Living Archive is an example of one as it juxtaposes contemporary landscape with selected archival images, thus sustaining an affective ideological narrative by recruiting topography, memory, and settler subjects (kibbutz members). Before attending to the Living Archive project and its components directly, I first revisit the notion of the deep map by retracing the development of my own perception of the ‘place’ of the kibbutz in which it is installed. Pearson and Shank propose the term ‘lifeworld,’ to address ‘the totality of a person’s direct involvement with the places and environments experienced in everyday life’ (Pearson and Shanks 2001: 153). The focus of my investigation is hence located at the level of the interface between the two – the deep map evoked by the Living Archive and that of my own lifeworld’s phenomenological orientation.
My Kibbutz Lifeworld

On a path in my paternal-ancestral kibbutz, halfway between my childhood house and my kindergarten, opposite the communal laundrette, there stands a large sycamore tree. This tree is mine. I always knew that it was planted by my grandfather Giora and his father, Zecharya, in the days of what registered in my child’s consciousness as the kibbutz-prehistory, the time before time. The time that gave shapes, names and meanings to my most obvious and solid landscapes, where even trees could be included as family members.

In a little known article published in 1991, Wolfe retraces the development of the concept of ‘dream-times’ (later ‘Dreaming’), attributed in popular culture to Koori aboriginal cosmology (Wolfe, ‘On Being Woken Up’ 1991). In the words of the ethnographer Ronald Berndt, ‘the concept of the Dreaming refers to a mythological period which had a beginning but has no foreseeable end […] these beings are believed to be just as much alive today as they ever were and as they will continue to be’ (Berndt 1974; cited in Wolfe 1991: 212). Reading through the inconsistencies and generalising work of Brendt and other earlier anthropologists, Wolfe demonstrates how rather than reflecting a concrete indigenous trope, ‘dream-times’ developed as a coin of western ethnography which closely served settler-ideology and needs:

The juxtaposition of origin and presence is echoed in Australian nationalist ideology, in which the two are divided by a notional moment of settlement. Here the retrospective aspect, which is the counterpart of origin—"back in the Dreamtime"—refers to the inscrutable (but occasionally glimpsed) era before Captain Cook, the First Fleet, or whatever might serve to summarise the establishment of the nation. Lacking a history, precontact Australia was unimaginable and, accordingly, unreal. Though it may seem to be labouring the obvious to state that the Dreamtime maps on to nationalist constructions of Australian prehistory, it is in its second aspect, that of the timeless ever-present, that the ideological consequence of the juxtaposition can best be appreciated. For the corollary of this unreal past became an unreal present which was the outcome of anthropological representations in which aborigines figured as ritually constituted entities (1991: 213).

The comparative framework of settler-colonialism invites the understanding of the mythical appropriation of landscape in the kibbutz and its investment with affect as the expression of settler desires and phenomenological arrangements parallel to those who gave rise to the notion of Dreaming in Australian ethnography. In turn, this inevitably reflects on the imagination (perception) of the indigenous Palestinian, its memory or negative-space, as pertaining to a shapeless, and therefore, moral-less, time-space. In the play King Boor (1940) that was written
for the kibbutz’s puppet-theatre company, the figuration of pre-settled landscape takes the shape of a sleeping King Boor, whose opening monologue conflates desert and wilderness with sleeping and indolence (Shimoni [1940] 1983: 5). Trees and buildings which along with topography are the objects that feature most commonly in the images of the Living Archive are cast as both the outcome of the awakening from Dreaming and as the very substance of the dream that is the kibbutz, juxtaposing origin and presence.

While the sycamore tree stands on the southern slope of the kibbutz’s central hill, the iconic water tower at the top of it forms another milestone of intersecting matrixes of belonging, identity, history, and landscape. As it is told in our family, the tower was built with the money sent to Zecharya by his father (my great-great grandfather) in their last communication before he was murdered with the rest of the family in the Nazi death camps. In a letter that Zecharya addressed to my father Gil (his grandson), he tells him that shortly after receiving the money, while working on the construction of the water tower it funded, he opened the last letter from his father, bearing the words ‘you were right, son.’ By this, Zecharya’s father admitted his defeat in the ongoing debate the two had regarding Zionism and immigration to Palestine, which the father opposed. Once attached to a landmark by a family-story, the words of my ancestor become the very orientation of my life, identity, and consciousness as a kibbutz-settler. On this deep map, the family story and its material facts draw a line that stretches from my own body to the very essence of Zionist settler-colonialism. It orientates the ancestral assets from Czechoslovakia incarnated in a water facility on a top of a hill in Palestine as encapsulating the complete settler-ideology of the kibbutz, where Czechoslovakia is accordingly aligned with annihilation and death, backward-facing, while the water tower on top of the hill with life, safety, and forward-facing futurity.

Reflected in – or projected on – the water tower and the sycamore tree, my deep map of Giva’at Haim thus consists of an archive, a monument, and a political argument all entangled as one. It is expressed by the accumulated impression of the juxtaposition of architecture, trees, documents, rumours, and storytelling. It is through it that my ingrained sense of settler-entitlement and complete obliviousness to any Palestinian presence in the kibbutz historical or present reality was facilitated and shaped. The totality of such a map summarised by Pearson

92 The Hebrew word ‘boor’ means both wilderness or uncultivated land as well as ignorance. The resemblance of the South Africa ‘boers’ is entirely incidental, yet intriguing.
and Shanks as ‘everything you might ever want to say about a place,’ works to relegate any alternative narratives of the kibbutz landscape to a background. The negative spaces on the deep map demarcate what is not to be said or, in time, cannot be said, about a place. Apparent here is Veracini’s idea of the settler narcissistic tendency discussed above, in the deep map’s invitation to recognise my reflection (as a trajectory of my forefathers) in trees and buildings. It is a show staged for me, by my family, kibbutz, and eventually, myself. As applied here, settler-narcissism is not an incidental trait of settler culture but rather the other side of the very work of disavowal, it is the product of the insistence to witness one’s own image in place of an (indigenous) other.

What my grandfather Zecharya did not mention in his letter to my father is that when standing on top of the water tower in 1940, before or after reading his father’s last letter, he could have still easily seen from there the houses of Manshiya or Zalafi, the Palestinians village neighbouring the kibbutz to the east and the north (respectively) that were emptied in 1948. This historical testimony and its potential archival entrees were edited out of my deep map of the kibbutz. Similarly, none of the twenty images included in the Living Archive were taken facing east or north-east. The pictures that feature landscape beyond the immediate vicinity of the kibbutz ground face either west or south, covering almost every single angle from the top of the hill and its surroundings in these particular directions. Literally, turning its back on Palestinian life prior to 1948, the settler’s phenomenology recreates the desired utopian fantasy in which the indigenous Palestinian never existed at all.

Returning to Taylor’s aforementioned idea of percepticide, the ontological aftermath of settler colonialism is expressed here in the inability to perceive Manshiya and Zlafe. In the Living Archive they are nowhere to be located, they dis(-)appear, do not show. One picture lends itself to a speculative recovery of their perception, the very first one, that of the first gate of the kibbutz; behind it lays an open field (Figure 17). As none of the pictures are dated and therefore can hardly be compared with other pictures in the kibbutz archive or in kibbutz members’ personal collections, although positioned westwards by the curator of the Living Archive project, the actual angle of the original picture might have faced east. In the background of the image, on the top-left corner of the image there is a dark stain. It is very hard to discern from the picture whether it is a group of houses or a grove. There is no evidence that these are the houses of Manshiya, which – given the photographer did in fact face east –
would have been in this proximate direction in the early 1930s. Within the context of the Living Archive as landscape-drag, I would like to think of this dark unrecognisable spot as the ghost of Manshiya, archived unintentionally in the background, juxtaposed against the kibbutz’s gate despite the performance of settler’s space, resisting the straightening device of the deep map. It is the loose connection of the image to the coordinates of the settler deep-map when thus positioned (precise date, other spatial indicators, available personal testimonies) that open up the possibility of reorientation by means of speculation. Once drawing attention to the conditions of arrival of landscape the Living Archive is theatricalising it and inevitably, interferes with straightening devices, evidencing the possible movement from background to foreground.

As I demonstrate in the following, in theatricalising the kibbutz’s deep map, the project of the Living Archive paradoxically and counter-productively (from the point of view of a settler-project) disturbs phenomenological alignments and generates instabilities (‘queer moments’, after Freeman) which I theorise as landscape-drag and as an expression of the paradox of settling and archiving.
A Walk through the Living Archive

Figure 17: 1st image of the Living Archive project, the gate to the kibbutz. Year unknown.
Figure 18 (top left): Top - 16th image of the living Archive; bottom – the sycamore tree
Figure 19 (top right): 7th image of the living Archive; The water tower
Figure 20 (middle left): 3rd image of the living Archive; The dining hall, 1933
Figure 21 (middle right): 10th image of the living Archive; Top - open view; bottom the culture centre, restricted view
Figure 22 (bottom): 5th image of the living Archive; The dining hall, 1961
Both the sycamore tree (Figure 18) and the water tower (Figure 19) feature in the Living Archive. The sign that marks the project’s starting-point announces: ‘Living Archive - Following the Footprints of Pioneers’ (see Figure 16). This title can be read both as an invitation to experience the archive as engaging and actual by taking a walk through it (rather than seating or reading in a passive or lifeless archive) but also as a framing of the entire site and community of the kibbutz and its landscape as the ‘living archive,’ a museological relic, or a reservoir. A useful comparison here is performance-studies scholar Richard Schechner’s discussion of the North American restored village, which he uses to theorise restored behaviour (Schechner [1985] 2000: 79-98). As touristic sites of reenactment and historical display restored villages provide their visitors with ‘a fantasy-provoking atmosphere’ (79). Schechner notes that, as of the year of his publication (1985), restored villages:

Typically, […] restore the colonial period or the nineteenth century; they reinforce the ideology of rugged individualism as represented by early settlers of the eastern states (Colonial Williamsburg, Plimoth Plantation), or the shoot-'em-up West (Buckskin Joe and Cripple Creek, Colorado; Cowtown, Kansas; Old Tucson, Arizona), or romanticized "heroic" industries like mining and whaling. Some like Amish Farms and Homes in Pennsylvania offer people actually living their lives; a few like Harper's Ferry in West Virginia commemorate historical confrontations (80).

In reenacting an historical colonial period, restored villages implicitly confirm the present as post- or non-colonial. However, all of the themes restored villages are dedicated for that Schechner enumerates pertain in this way or another to central topes by which Veracini characterises settler-culture (2010): reaffirmation with pure and just provenance, utopian society of especially high morals, obfuscation of founding violence and elimination of the indigenous by necropolitical (35), perceptual (37), or assimilative means (ibid). Although the role of these heritage-sites as contemporary agents of US settler-culture is entirely absent from Schechner’s discussion, as much as his own settler-positionality, it does establish a vital insight into the performance practices by which settler societies narrate themselves. For Schechner ‘the scope of the architectural reconstructions and the behaviours of the persons who work in the villages make these restorations more than museums,’ or as is the title of one of his main study sources: ‘living museums.’

There are equivalents of restored villages in different kibbutzim in Israel (such as Kibbutz Shel Pa’am in Yad Mordechai, The reconstructed Tel-93

Khai Court, Ein-Shemer and others), where visitors are immersed in differing degrees in artificial environments operated by (reen)actors aided with historically authentic objects and costumes. While ‘restored kibbutzim’ are operating in the vicinity of the kibbutz, usually on the outskirts, as a commercial endeavour, the Living Archive is augmented right in its middle. It does not participate in a syncopated act of performance but rather performs as landscape. As an aesthetic gesture, when compared to ‘living museums,’ the living archive is closer to the hanging of family pictures on the living-room walls rather than a display in a gallery or museum. Therefore, the archive in the Living Archive calls for a different understanding than the one Giannachi, for example, aligns with the latter. Schechner reports that in some restored villages ‘people [actors] live on location’ (Schechner 2000: 93), or ‘become permanent residents, living off the income of their crafts and eating the food they have cooked that day in the presence of visitors’ (97). By constructing a Living Archive around them, kibbutz members cast themselves as the reenactors of their restored village, as well as its visitors. Their ordinary lives are contextualised through the conflation of origin and presence which Wolfe recognised in the settler notion of Dreaming, and it is indeed this conflation that intersects Schechner’s restored villages, kibbutz historical reenactments and museums, and the Living Archive.

Numbered from one to twenty, the images form a path, a route constituting an actual line on an actual map, through which visitors or kibbutz members are instructed to learn histories of the kibbutz in a particular order, generating a particular view. After cultural theorist Michael De Certeau, Tilley describes paths as the embodiment of routinised actions in space, explicating the phenomenological affinity of rout and routine (Tilley 1994: 28-31). Similarly to Guy Debord and the Situationists in 1960s Paris who sought to break away from routinised urban spaces, De Certeau described walking as ‘simultaneously an art of thinking and an art of practice or operating in the world,’ where ‘movement through space constructs “spatial stories” [and] forms of narrative understanding’ (Tilley 28). In his study of site-specific theatre, Pearson relate walking to performing a narrative, noting that ‘walking is a spatial acting out a kind of a narrative […] different paths enact different stories for action for which landscape acts as mnemonic’ (Pearson 2010: 95).

However, where walking the path of the Living Archive seems to be the most immediate mode of participation in it, ‘performing’ its route – its relationship with narrative is ambivalent. Adjacent to each image is a short text, framing the image and bridging gaps between the photographed scene and the contemporary landscape (accounting for missing buildings,
topographic inconsistencies, and other incoherencies). Some of the texts provide more
information than others, assigning significance to a site due to its place and function in early
kibbutz life, but each text is autonomous and does not reference the others. Thus, apart from
the numerical sequence, the Living Archive does not seem to narrate a linear organised story
but rather is experienced as an accumulation of dots, where relations and overarching meanings
remain relatively open to subjective impressions and interpretations. I see a connection here
between the fragmented nature of kibbutz settler archive with its ideological and
phenomenological implications I discussed in the previous chapter to the design of the Living
Archive. The empty spaces between one station on the project’s trail to another allow the
participant-walker to disavow and omit material from the tolled story of the locale and its
landscape, but it is also this quality that lends to the project transgressive readings of meaning
and intent.

Image number one (Figure 17) seems to suggest the beginning of a certain narrative of origin,
along a linear time while forming a line in space. As discussed earlier, this is the first gate of
the kibbutz, which orientates the spectators (or walkers) by positioning them with their back to
the east and facing the large building of the dining-hall (Figure 17). Interestingly, the text of
the first image undercuts both the imagination of Tera Nullies, or desert in its Zionist
incarnation, and of the denial of founding violence or affirmation of pure provenance:

‘in July 14th, 1932 we left Hadera, four members, with a cart laden with agricultural
tools and food for one day. We cut down few trees from the grove that marked the
territory and said that here will be the entrance to the kibbutz’ (cited from Giva’at
Haim Book). From here invaded the British Tank on the day of the siege on Giva’at
Haim in November 1945 [bracketed text in the original).

The story of pioneering that sets the scene for the Living Archive involves two more or less
violent actions: one of the cutting down of trees and the other of the invasion of a tank. While
the latter forges the association with conflict with the British and by that relegates to the
background any settler violence towards Palestinians in accordance with settler-colonial
paradigm, the former is more curious. The testimony of cutting down trees does not
complement the imagining of the terra nullius as desert (as I discuss in Chapter 1 in relation to
King Boor) nor with the image of the settler associated with the plantation of trees, the digging
of wells and sowing of seeds. The quoted witness remains anonymous in the sign, and thus
‘we’ can be attributed to all or to no one. Image number two, already oriented by the first
image, and positioned several steps up the hill from it, is facing south-east and attends to the naming of the Kibbutz after Haim Arlossoroff in summer 1933 (see Chapter 6). Featuring several white tents in its centre, and large trees on the left (again, not much of a desert) the image effectively contrasts the gesture of settlement (tents) with the open landscape at its background. Several houses behind the kibbutz tents suggest the existence of another settlement but these are not contextualised through the adjacent text, which, together with the name, enumerates the number of settlers (120) and buildings (one concrete house and fifteen shacks).

The two first stations on the path of Living Archive thus enshrine the two most fundamental gestures of the settler-colonial project: arrival to the land and its conquest (cutting down of trees, which as we remember, are associated in Judaism and modern Hebrew with human lives and citizenship) and its population by settlers. Neither communism, socialism, nor Judaism (religious or cultural) are present. Although Image 2 (Figure 23) offers the opportunity for the foregrounding of kibbutz socialism through the comparison of the modest functional kibbutz tents in the front with several large private houses of Moshav Kefar Hogla (a non-socialist settlement) which could not have housed such a large number of settlers as the kibbutz is said to have included in the summer of 1933. Even this remains highly speculative as the image
itself is not dated and there is no direct assertion that it reflects the reality of 1933, even if the juxtaposition of text and image suggests it. Socialism will only be hinted at next, in the third station.

Chronologically, the 3rd image (Figure 20) presents a regression, as it presents the kibbutz’s first communal dinning-hall, stating it was the place in which – additionally to eating and convening – members used to sleep before the tents of the previous image were pitched. Within the idiosyncratic ontology of the kibbutz, however, the dining hall not only represents the community and communal values but also the means of vernacular periodisation. In a manner that curiously reflects the discourse of Jewish recounting of time through the first and the second temples, the dining-hall features in the Living Archive mainly as a marker of a period and is referred to as the first (Figure 20 – top, built 1933), the second (Figure 22 – top; built 1961), and the ‘new’ dining-hall (Figure 20 – bottom, built 1984). Topographically, the dining hall is positioned at the top of the hill, physically the highest point of the process that started at the gate (Figure 17) and followed by the tents and the name (Figure 23). The linearity and coherence of the narrative of the living archive seems from this point to go – physically and metaphorically – downhill. The remaining eighteen images fail to suggest any interrelations of an overarching narrative.

When I walk the trail of the Living Archive accompanied by my grandmother and father, additional layers are added to the map of the project. The enlarged photographs are juxtaposed not only with the landscape but also with the stories told by them both, provoked by the images and the spaces between them, their affective responses blending with my own.

The impact is strong enough that at times my knowledge of the kibbutz area prior to 1948 and its Palestinian history gives way to the mirage of the Living Archive, costuming the landscape of an eighty-four year old settler colony with the attire of a timeless utopia. At other times, chapters of family history and the subjective experiences of the three of us are triggered by images but take different directions, not necessarily flowing or enhancing (repeating) the line marked by the Living Archive. For example, the text on picture 6 (Figure 24) that features young babies in the sun says: ‘with the help of “sun-bath” the babies will grow up to be loyal kibbutz members.’ Failing to decode any connection between the mid-century practice of exposing young children to strong sunlight and the loyalty of kibbutz members, my father reads the text as intentionally cynical. For him, what is archived in this image is bitterness or
disappointment of the failure of the kibbutz as a utopian project. Intuitively he moves to talk about getting sunburned at the beginning of each summer after which, he says, ‘we could just run around barefoot and practically naked, like African children.’ In responding to the provocation that he reads in this image, my father foregrounds a connection between the practice of ‘sun-bathing’ babies and the performances of Africa Day he partook in as a child as constituting an ideological-performative continuum of shaping the bodies of kibbutz settlers. This ‘re-presenced’ connection indicates the opposite of inherently belonging to a place. It brings to the fore the repetitions of lines, the conditions of arrival of the settler body, where extreme corrective measures were performed on people’s bodies and minds in order to mark them as ‘from here’ (yet, the subject being indigenised could not have been indigenous to begin with). The landscape of the kibbutz with its kindergartens is theatricalised by the Living Archive. Its images draw attention to the act of watching and, by that, suspending straightening devices, and foreground conditions of arrival which appear oblique (and therefore appear) in the naturalised grid of the everyday kibbutz locale.

The path of the Living Archive completes a full circle towards its end, leading the walker back towards the parking lot. Images 18 and 19 are the only ones to face east, in the general direction where Manshiya would have been, but the former is associated with the year 1963 and the latter is said to have been taken in 1980 (the only explicitly dated image in the project). Both are closed-frame pictures of buildings which do not exist anymore, taken long after 1948, in a time where kibbutz trees were large enough to block any potential view eastwards. At this point I am quite overwhelmed with thoughts and emotions and therefore forget to ask my father about Manshiya. It is only later when we visit the project of the Living Archive again, this time through the website of the kibbutz archive in which the project is presented chronologically, where the historic images are juxtaposed with contemporary images of the sites in which the signs are positioned. The experience in the digitalised Living Archive is fundamentally different, the two-dimensional, desensitised sequence of images obliterates much of the affective, ambivalent, and evasive layers of the kibbutz deep map we experienced the first time. From here, it is perhaps easier to ask about Manshiya and Zalafa, aided by the results of a google search of the village’s location on British Mandate maps (Figure 25) and the images from expulsions of Palestinians in 1948. Reiterating a line which I have heard many a times before, my father’s answer begins with ‘no one ever talked about this.’ Immediately afterwards, he mentions the names of the two villages and describe their exact locations, he says ‘Zalafa
Sends’ was a name of a place they used to go to as children and then he tells me of the people of Manshiya who used to come to fetch water from the tap by the water tower. The fifteen years during which Manshiya, Zalafa and Giva’at Haim existed side by side did leave a mark on the kibbutz locale, deep enough to register in the consciousness of a person who was born more than a decade after the villages were emptied. This conversation did not feel like a moment of remembering in the way one might repeat a traumatic lacuna or the return of a repressed material. Rather, it seemed to me that my father attends to accessible information that with time is registered as unimportant, accumulating at the background of the kibbutz locale, on the other side of the camera and out of view. The Landscape Drag performed by the Living Archive may not intend to enable the coming into view the Palestinian history of the kibbutz and its surroundings, but once straightening devices are suspended oblique materials are revealed involuntarily.

Figure 25: A British map from 1942 that was updated in 1959. The purple ink indicates the Palestinian villages that no longer existed in 1959, by adding the bracketed Hebrew word ‘destroyed’ (Harus סורה) next to their names (in English), and the names of the new Zionist settlements that were established after 1942, marked by a circle.

The map is sourced from the digital maps archive of Zochrot (Heb. ‘Remembering’) NGO; zochrot.org; accessed January 2019.

Living (the) Archive

This experience of the Living Archive highlights most intensely the function of the archive as a reassuring mirror, reflecting the kibbutz’s modified self-image. The emergence of similar projects in numerous kibbutzim can be read against the deteriorating currency of the image and myth of the kibbutz in Israeli public discourse (see Chapter 1). It seems that in light of the
kibbutz’s failed socialism and the frequent harsh criticism of its elitist legacies, the need of reassuring image is ever more pressing. Somewhat ironically, the desire to be perceived as relevant in contemporary Israeli society is what motivates the exhibition of the past, as arguing for the importance of the kibbutz to the movement of colonisation and, thus, the existence of the Zionist state. However, the project and its initiators do not state the intended audience of the Living Archive. If it is the kibbutz members and future generations, the Living Archive serves a paramount example of the shift in the role of archives from the models of administrative-archive (0.1) and active/ordering-archive (2.0) into a model closer to archive-as-experience (3.0). In this latter model, the archive is no longer just an “impulse” (Foster 2004) or a “fever” (Derrida 1995), it is the lens or interface through which we ‘perceive, interact, and often extract value from our environment and, increasingly, the apparatus through which the latter can, quite literally, (in)form us’ (Giannachi 2016: 21). While walking its path I often wondered whether rather than a desire to take the archive outside, into everyday kibbutz life, the Living Archive in fact expresses a wish to move into the archive altogether, away from a reality where new settler-elites direct and author the Zionist settler project. For them, the enduring complex personal relations of memory, topography, architecture, history, rumour and cynicisms that are archived in the kibbutz locale, and charted in its deep map, may not be so favourable as they are susceptible to tell more than is desirable for current settler-objectives. The kibbutz-settlers’ attraction to witness their own image can cause an oversight of the elements of this image which undermine or jeopardise settler disavowal. The conflict of the settler with the settler-project as theorised by Mamdani (2015) can thus contextualise the kibbutz’s struggle to re-brand itself as contemporary, or at least, as valuable – ideologically and pragmatically – through merchandising, and performing, archives. A different potential target audience of the Living Archive is history itself, to which Martin Buber once made a commitment in the name of the kibbutz to be ‘the experiment that does not to fail’ (as I discuss in Chapter 1). By conflating settler origin and presence as an inbuilt element of the kibbutz’s landscape, the Living Archive seems to address this promise and to argue for its fulfilment. As such the project and kibbutz dwellers constitute the ‘Living’ element of the ‘Living Archive’ and are archived by it. They orient each other, projecting one another back into the past and forward into a future.

The living archive is already accessible online, through the archive section of the kibbutz’s website. Giannachi’s survey of the contemporary workings of archives ends with considering
projects of augmented reality, cyber-archives, and bio-archive to which she refers as ‘(A)live Archives (2016: 153-162). Following the trajectory of her contemplation, possible developments of the Living Archive could include a GPS-powered app that will store digital data featured on social media, sound and video archives, connecting in real-time all of the kibbutz community or broadcasting its life live. The conflation, integration, and synthesis of archival footage with everyday experience which the Living Archive presently gestures towards can thus evolve into far reaching dimensions, both as constituting kibbutz subjectivities internally, and in advocating and re-branding settler ideologies externally. This fictional scenario might lead to new settler-realities and mind sets, when technology will be met with the inherent settler inclinations to narcissism and disavowal. In a reality thus speculated, inspired by the logic of archive-evolution that Giannachi delineates, the archive will no longer be an important part of the kibbutz life and identity but will become the kibbutz itself. Returning to the conceptual theme of this chapter, this prompts the question: would such a future kibbutz archive still perform landscape-drag, destabilising straightening devices and permitting disavowed material to come onto view? Or, to ask differently and more concretely, what is the fate of Palestinian counter archives within the kibbutz archive in light of contemporary trends of opening up, digitising and appropriating archives? As with any historical trope, the factor of witnesses and first-hand testimonies is in question. My grandfather – who surprised me one day by reciting Arabic children songs he said he learned from the children in Manshiya – passed away shortly before I included the Living Archive in my project. The preservation of knowledge and testimony of Palestinian lives and history of the kind I have explored in the Living Archive, and the potential of excavating and revealing it, is time-bound precisely because most of it is stored in negative-spaces, in the background. Its access, more often than not, depends on people who lived before and during 1948.
In *Stone, Paper* (2012) Gardi deploys various genres and styles of writing in order to capture both the implications of the knowledge he excavates in the archive and their affective residues, while, simultaneously reflecting upon his own positionality. The book retraces the story of the kibbutz’s natural-history museum or, more precisely, the story of the stones that construct its building. These are the stones of the houses of the destroyed Palestinian village Hoonin, whose lands are located several kilometres to the north-west of Kibbutz Dan. The stones were brought to the kibbutz to build the museum after the village was evacuated and destroyed in 1948. Gardi’s challenging confrontation with silenced histories leads to one of its horrific points when he excavates the testimonies of brutal war crimes committed against four women of Hoonin by soldiers of the Zionist forces.

Once the landmark of the museum is singled out and its orientation as a taken-for-granted element of the kibbutz landscape is destabilised, Gardi finds himself disoriented. The kibbutz archive to which he turns assumes a double role as both a provider and obfuscator of answers; both a familiar home and a place to get lost in. Gardi’s disordered juxtaposition of topics and materials reveals a methodology of archival research which, after Ahmed, I read as queer in its refusal to align with or commit to existing lines of perception. In what appears as a last – desperate even - attempt to make sense of his discoveries, towards the end of the book Gardi resorts to writing a short play, titled *Siman* (Hebrew: sign; mark; letter; indicator). I read *Siman* to unpack the use of archival material in a dramatic composition devised to confront the reality of settler-colonial structures of violence. I give special attention to the way Gardi’s text is oriented around his position of a settler that uncovers difficult histories of settlement and the limitations that this position imposes on trajectories of resisting or suspending straightening-devices of settler colonialism. The play serves a productive example here not only from the perspective of a unique Hebrew dramatic text that deals with the paradox of settlement and archiving, but also due to the dramatisation of a conversation (dialogue) as a singular exception to Gardi’s overarching self-referential (self-oriented) tone.

The first action that Gardi performs in *Stone, Paper* (‘Even, Niyar’) is one of remembering or, rather, acknowledging the failure to remember:
I don’t remember why and don’t remember when. It’s important for me. I try. I try again. I try, again, and fail. I can’t find the records of that moment. Years have passed since. When was it? And how did it happen that we suddenly started talking of this dumb subject? And how come we never talked of it before that unknown moment? And how did the talking suddenly pop-up and then disappeared? And where did it go? (Gardi 2012: 5)

The moment that Gardi attempts to remember is a moment of phenomenological transition. It is the moment in which the knowledge of the connection between Beit-Ussishkin – the natural history museum in his native Kibbutz Dan – and the violent destruction of the Palestinian village Hoonin became available to him. Gardi doesn’t seem to suggest that this knowledge was a secret that at a certain point was revealed to him but more information that was available, or could be available, but not registered as significant by him and his kibbutz surroundings. Whenever he did hear something about it, multiple straightening-devices relegated it and its ethical, political and identity-related implications to a background. He positions his successful attempt to remember as a failure of the archive, where the records cannot be found. The contemplation of that perceptual transitions leads to the questions that ignite the journey of his book. In that respect, his project is an attempt to resist the disappearance of that moment, to retrace where it is that ‘it went to’, to reorient himself. The strategies that he experiments with in order to do so are those that I examine as landscape drag. As I demonstrate, while Gardi’s intervention is discursive and symbolic rather than taking place in physical space, like the Living Archive, the perception of landscape and the orientation within and though it, remain the point of convergence for settler-archive, settler-culture, and the phenomenological work through which both come into being.

Before interrogating the stones’ arrival, Gardi suggests he perceived the old building as an extension of nature, in line with the intentions of the architect who created its large pediment (Figure 26) to ‘reflect the wild landscape of Mount Hermon (Arabic: Jabel A’Sheich) that is visible behind it’ (Website of The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, 2019). Later, he reveals the building’s relationship to nature as even more charged, through exposing the conditions of another arrival, its function as the depository of specimens of flora and fauna that were brought to it after the draining of the Hula Lake in the kibbutz’s vicinity. Gardi records how the settlers’ drive to empty the lake for agricultural and settlement purposes was curbed by the British administration that did not see the need to destroy the fecund natural habitat but
was later approved by the State of Israel shortly after its establishment (Gardi 2012: 155-6). In this way, Beit-Ussishkin also became an archive of taxidermy, stones, and dried plants and, simultaneously, a monument for the destruction of the ecological habitat from which they were brought.

![Image of Beit-Ussishkin](image.png)

Figure 26: Beit-Ussishkin, Kibbutz Dan, Upper Galilee. Sourced from the website of The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, 2019. Photographer unknown.

The preoccupation with the conditions of arrival and their exposure is at once here physical, historical, environmental, and phenomenological, where the author’s work in multiple archives and on forms of archiving is aimed to retrace the route that the stones of Hoonin travelled in order to become Beit-Ussishkin. Once the latter existed, the stones disappeared, no longer carrying their heritage or testimony but were accumulated by a new entity, whose orientation does not extend their meaning, or indeed their ontology, in time and space. By retracing the physical arrival of the stones historically, Gardi reorients Beit-Ussishkin phenomenologically, he interferes with the naturalness (being taken-for-granted) of the natural history museum, and its relationship with landscape, with the kibbutz, with himself, and with the larger collectives to which he belongs.

Questions arise at the moment where we are not sure where or what we are, when our orientation is lost. Gardi’s compulsive questioning theatricalises the act of interrogating, framing it as a gesture or assertion of ideological position:
If they already build a natural history museum with the stones of the destroyed Arabic village, Hoonin was its name, as I found out at some point, in the Zionist Archive in Jerusalem of all places, why, if the museum of natural history is built from the stones of the village that was called Hoonin, why there is no memory of this village in our history in the museum? Why there is no memory in it to the existence of the dozens of Arab villages in the geography of the Hula Valley? Why in the history and the nature that the museum seeks to produce there are no and never were any Arabs here? What is the meaning of this erasure? How do the rules of information function? The collective protocols of narrative? And also – if not most of all – what does that erasure, that expulsion, that oppression, has to do with the erasure and oppression of Arabs in our places today, currently, not in that war but rather now, while I type these words, at this very moment (7).

Gardi’s fragmented language, its repetitiveness, and disarray, the confusion of the line of the question and the recounting of information already known all express the phenomenological chain-reaction that his questions activate, traversing time and space, the inanimate and the human, the historical and the contemporary. These are questions enabled through the suspension of straightening devices that guard (much like the archive’s gate keeper) the perception of landscape. With the text quoted above as its starting point, the book in its entirety is situated as an attempt to provide answers, find out, expose, and fill up negative spaces.

Echoing Ahmed’s disclaimer at the introduction to Queer Phenomenology where she articulates the position of a non-philosopher that writes phenomenology (2006: 22), Gardi openly approaches the archive as a non-historian (in Sela 2012). While Ahmed highlights the epistemological risk and ‘promise […] that the failure to return texts to their histories will do something’ (22), Gardi links his advantage as a non-historian in the archive to more material structures of power and coercion. He asserts that ‘when an historian enters the archive, as much as they may attempt to assume a critical position, they still depend on the archive for their living.’ He asks: ‘What would an historian who has burnt bridges with the archive do?’ (in Sela 2012). Together, they make an argument for the advantage of an oblique position in relation to a discipline, where the epistemological-theoretical and the material-personal both emerge as highly political and can hardly be separated. In an interview, he comments on this aspect of his work, noting: ‘during the process of writing I realised that I am actually creating an archive myself, one that will be different from the archives I visited’. If Gardi’s archive is indeed different it is in the way that its documents announce themselves as contextual, partial, and inherently enigmatic. As such, they are perhaps inadequate to produce a qualified historiographic study, but as components of a novel they produce something else that informs
the role of the archive itself in a settler-colonial reality. By approaching the contentious material of the archive obliquely, Gardi’s own archive consists not only of a non-hierarchical accumulation of historical documents, literature, conversations, rumours, and personal memories but also of the selection of approaches he tests in his work in the kibbutz archive. Within the work of connecting dots and tracking information, Gardi’s attention wanders constantly from the exhibition and analysis of data to the very processes and means of accessing it. He records and reflects on his conversations with workers of the different archives he visits, exposing them as indivisible from the archive’s production of knowledge and its orientation (the lines it follows). He finds that rather than encountering a ‘singular value of concealing’ (censorships), the archive and its workers are in continuous dialogue of ‘concealing and revealing’, negotiating which material is sensitive and which is not, which is redundant, and which is of an interest, and who is qualified to review what material (Sela 2012). This background of his work in the archive is foregrounded by Gardi and become an ‘as important’ document in his study’s depiction of the paradoxical relations and conditions of disavowal in the settler archive.

The pursuit of documents about the destruction of Hoonin and its houses is conflated by Gardi with research of another concealed history. He reconstructs an operation of the Zionist army forces to capture evaders who did not report to their compulsory military service in August 1948 (Gardi 2012: 51-98). Within the Zionist ethos of heroism and nation-building of 1948, the very existence of military service evaders is understatedly marginal. For the depiction of a period totalised in public memory as the epitome of selfless sacrifice in the face of existential threat, the records of hundreds of individuals who refused to participate in combat is nothing short of subversive. As a personal political gesture, the act of refusing to perform military service is perhaps the most performative gesture of dis-aligning, of being oblique, within the national ideological context of the state. The two historical investigations are connected in multiple lines, all of which do not conform to established temporal and spatial lines of accepted Zionist narrative. While both occur more or less contemporaneously and both are actions executed by the newly formed Israeli Defence Force against civilians, the location of one is the northern border and the other the central metropolises, one is the story of war crimes committed against Palestinians while the other is one of enforcing the law of the new state on its civilians. Thematically, the two events are aligned by their relegation to the background, deemed unimportant and inconsequential, and by bringing them into view simultaneously Gardi
operates to interfere with the way history and national narrative are perceived. Moreover, the alignment of the operation of capturing and prosecuting military service evaders with a story of a destroyed Palestinian village works to suspend specifically settler-colonial straightening devices that routinely disavow the indigenous and justify any violence against it (paradoxically – as how can violence be committed against a subject who does not exist to begin with?). The very obliqueness – strangeness or ‘out-of-line-ness’ – of the connection theatricalises this moment, suspends its glossing over, and forces awareness of the act of perceiving historical narrative. Thus, for a moment, the violent history of Hoonin can be perceived without being immediately dismissed (straightened; eliminated) as one of many ‘Nakba stories’ which are contextualised, rationalised, and excused within existing settler discourse. These connections are never stressed directly by Gardi’s fragmented text but remain implicit and, therefore, open and flexible, refusing to commit themselves to forming an alternative line (narrative). Gardi makes do with the disturbing oblique, the confusing.

**Siman’s Scenography of Settler (de)Colonising**

Seemingly intended as a literary étude more than a text to be staged, the three scenes of the play *Siman* (Sign or Symbol) that Gardi includes at the end of his work effectively dramatise the dilemmas, paradoxes, and anxieties he encounters at the crossroads of settler colonialism, its atrocities, and the work of and in archives. The Hebrew word *Siman* signifies a range of meanings: symbol, sign, indicator, symptom, mark, and signal; all share the quality of coming into being through habituation and repetition, representing lines as they are understood by Ahmed. While the enigmatic name is not contextualised explicitly within the play itself, it does suggest the interrogation of the formation of such lines of perception in the archival research Gardi conducts and the realities that archive both records and influences. Each of the three scenes address a different paradox, or dilemma, of and in the settler archive or its decolonisation.

The first scene is based on a record of a meeting that took place on 10 August 1948 between the delegates of Hoonin and officials of the Zionist forces; a record that Gardi presents and discusses as an historical document earlier in the book (123-126). In that meeting, the leaders of Hoonin requested permission from representatives of the Zionist army and government to
return to their villages, now that the war is over. The permission was not granted officially nor explicitly denied in the meeting, but a few weeks later the houses were blown up and the people of Hoonin became refugees (ibid). Gardi retrieves the names that appeared in the document and stages an imaginary dialogue between the delegates of Hoonin and himself:

[Lights on. Kibbutz Dan. Beit Osishkin. Morning. Tomer Gardi stands on the stone-stage at the top of the staircase, by the stone railing, to the right. Next to him, stand Shaker Phares, Mohammad Wakid, Mohammad Alsha’ar, Mohammad Barjawi.]

TOMER GARDI
[Sighs]
There. Right here.
[Caresses the stone railing with his hand]
Here
[Pensive. Caresses the stone railing]
Here
[Caresses the stone railing. Silent]

MOHAMMAD ALASHA’AR
Here! Here! Here what?

TOMER GARDI
Here.
Here.
Here on the stone railing I slid
A rollicking child from the top of the stairs,
On the surface of white, cool, smooth stone
Down towards the grass’s green, a child’s heart flutters
And from the grass back to the top of the stairs, running,
And down again, wearing shorts and undershirt, barefoot. (2012: 157)

The first word Gardi speaks in his play establishes a phenomenological zero-point. The zero-point of his body (as theorised by Ahmed after Merleau-Ponty) is connected here to the stone railing of the museum. ‘Here’ – the interface between the two - emerges as the point of orientation, the place from which the perception of (physical, ideological, historical, emotional) space begins for him. Since throughout Gardi’s book the building of the museum stands for both the idea and the practice of the archive, fixing the zero-point of Gardi’s orientation on its interface with the body suggests the articulation of his method, or underlying approach, in using the archive, reading its materials, and performing them in his writing. From his declared position of a non-historian, he does not exclude any part of his experience when entering the kibbutz settler-archive and, more than anything his body, as pertaining to affect, somatic impressions, ambivalence, and orientation in space.
In the same way that he casts himself in the role of the protagonist in the scene (as in the following one), the play is staged on the museum’s ‘stone-stage at the top of the staircase,’ a site already used as a stage for different kibbutz functions. Specifically, it is the place where Gardi used to perform in schools plays and festivals. Within the modern ontology of theatre, a stage is often understood as the zero point of orientation from which a performance unfolds, and meanings are made; a configuration which soundly resonates in theatre director Peter Brook’s ‘empty space’ (Brook 2008). Therefore, the gesture of staging a play which has as its underlying subject the violent settler-colonial history of the very stones of the stage on which the play is performed goes beyond the intertextuality of site-specific art. It renders the stage and the building of which it is part oblique, dis-aligned and slantwise to the deep map of Kibbutz Dan as it is drawn and lived by its community. The stage is no longer the neutral site of performing settler-culture that disavows its conditions of arrival; it is now bent.

From this zero-point of orientation, Gardi extends his interrogation in time and space, attempting to orientate his lifeworld. As a direct continuation, or counter experience, to his childhood play on the museum’s stone railing, he recalls:

> It was the Eighties. Rockets whistled. But where is the shooting coming from? I asked the grownups. But where are they shooting us from? And who? From the refugee camps, said the grownups. How many times did I hear: ‘from the refugee camps’. I never thought about what it is. What’s refugee camps Dad? Where are these refugees from, Dad? Why are they shooting on us from there, Mum? And when the rockets stopped, the refugee camps disappeared as well (158)

Firstly, Gardi articulates the work of settler-colonial straightening devices through the dependency of the appearance of the refugee-camps – the direct result of Zionist settler-colonialism – in his settler perception on the appearance of the rockets. The former dis-appear (become invisible) once the latter disappears (out of sight). The same tactic of spatial inquiry (‘where did it come from?’) Gardi applies to the stones of the museum, he now uses in relation to the memory of rockets falling, and the trajectory launched by the question leads him back to Hoonin. This is essentially a phenomenological method, not unlike Husserl’s exploration of his writing table (in Ahmed 2006: 29), Merlau-Ponty’s theorisation of ‘left’ and ‘right’ in relation to the body (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2012: 112-170) or Ahmed’s inquiry into what it means to be sexually-oriented. The settler mechanism of disavowing violence as emerging from the colonial situation, or the resistance and retaliation of the indigenous, is interrupted here once the rockets are re-aligned with refugees whose houses were destroyed and their
stones are now a museum in which Gardi plays, a stone-stage on which he performs. The historical and spatial connections which thus far were at the background of perception are now at the front. They are ‘presenced’ not through historiographic research in the archive alone nor by Gardi’s testimony, but through the intersection of both and their contextualisation in time and space (orientation).

The extrication of the rockets out of their anonymity once contextualised through alignment with the stones of the museum parallels Gardi’s use of the names of the representatives of Hoonin in the meeting with the IDF forces in his play. Shaker Phares, Mohammad Wakid, Mohammad Alsha’ar and Mohammad Barjawi are the only names of people of Hoonin known to him from his research, they were stored in the archive, and the act of recalling their names is to come as close as possible to meeting and interacting with them. The insufficiency and one-sidedness of this gesture highlights those areas of erasure and elimination that cannot be reversed, brought to the foreground, or recovered. It is a significant reminder to the limitations of decolonisation as experimented by Gardi and theorised in terms of phenomenological resistance to straightening-devices. Yet, the use of people’s names does work to humanise the image of indigenous subjects within settler-discourse – historical and political as much cultural – who otherwise remain anonymous, featuring as generalised statistical figures or locations on a map, if ever mentioned at all.

As characters in the play, the delegates personify Gardi’s self-criticism. They mock and dismiss his project in the kibbutz archive as yet another attempt to celebrate himself as the settler. For example, the character Shaker Phares asks him sardonically:

‘Is this your Heart of Darkness? The archive? When the colonialist runs out of blank (white) spaces on the map, instead of traveling in space, he now travels in time? Is this what drives you, you space-less Odysseus? To stick a flag with your name on it on a piece of the past never seen before by a white-man’s eye?’ (163).

Through the imagined voices of Palestinian refugees, indeed their ventriloquising, Gardi marks the limitations of his project in the archive by pushing them further, provocatively. Launched from Gardi’s body and the museum as its zero-point of orientation, the trajectory of the scene as a whole essentially returns to questioning ethical as well as phenomenological horizons, articulating his ambivalence towards both legitimacy and efficacy of art as political action in this context. The auto-scrutiny of his own narcissism both exposes as well as reiterates it. In
the first scene of his play Gardi may decolonise the settler-archive but not himself as a settler-subject.

The second scene of the play deals with a story of four women of Hoonin who were raped and murdered by Zionist soldiers and whose bodies were burnt. Encountering it in the archive by chance while retracing the history of the stones, Gardi reconstructs the story of these events from multiple and partial records he assembles. Unlike the men of Hoonin, the names of the women do not appear in any of the records, they remain a negative space, which becomes the topos of the scene. The scene begins with the four women reciting the first lines of the witches from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, after which Woman D says:

**WOMAN D**  
Shakespeare…like witches they burnt us. Women’s justice. Typical. And also, that it’s only us [out of everyone] who doesn’t have names. That too.

[…]

**TOMER GARDI**  
[takes few steps towards to them. Holds up. Turns to them]  
But I don’t know your names.  
[They don’t answer him]  
The names do not appear anywhere in the archive!  
[they don’t answer. Woman C turns her head to him and then back to the other women. They don’t answer]  
What am I supposed to do?

[…]

**WOMAN A**  
[half-turns her head to him]  
You can ask.  
[turns back to the other three]

**TOMER GARDI**  
What are your names?  
[silence]  
What are your names?  
[silence]  
What are your names?  
[they don’t answer]  
What are your names? What are your names?

**WOMAN C**  
We will never tell you.
WOMAN A
Never. (167-8)

Where the inability to access the men of Hoonin – to bring them back – is somewhat overcome by the use of their names, the anonymity of the women is enacted as the central conflict of the scene. Similarly, as the individuation of the name humanises the men, the details of the atrocities committed against the four women concretises and materialises the trauma of the horrific violence of genocide that is archived in the stones of the museum. Dominick LaCapra associates namelessness with trauma in defining it ‘as precisely the gap – the open wound – in the past that resists being entirely filled in, healed, or harmonised in the present. In a sense it is a nothing that remains unnameable’ (1997: 244). Gardi’s characters of the women are both nameless and unnameable. Through granting his characters the refusal to give their names to him they acquire certain agency which only serves to amplify the totality of dispossession and annihilation the historical women of Hoonin were subjected to upon the destruction of their village.

However, the trauma for which Gardi makes space in his play is not the trauma of the indigenous but rather the traumatic moment of recognising the image of a perpetrator in the mirror of the archive. In the rest of scene, the women ask Gardi to stage, with them, Harold Pinter’s *Mountain Language* (1988), a short play that depicts the violent reality of military occupation and regimes of biopower. The women insist that Gardi will play the role of the sergeant – the executioner of violence, a literary gesture suggesting the perception of the reality of colonialism as a deterministic role-play, repeated and perpetuated eternally. When Gardi’s character refuses to play the sergeant, he is scorned by the women:

TOMER GARDI
[to Woman D]
Enough. Stop it.
[She doesn’t answer.]
Stop!
[She doesn’t answer him.]
But I don’t want to!
[She doesn’t answer.]
I don’t want to play this role!
[She raises her head towards him.]
I don’t want to do it!

WOMAN D
[she imitates him]
“I don’t want to play this role!”
“I don’t want to do it!”
What, on top of everything else you are now going to blame us for your role?
[returns to play the role of the Elderly Woman] (170)

What Gardi is staging in this scene by using the memory of the victims of Hoonin is in fact the state of a perpetrator’s trauma (Anderson 2018; Mohamed 2015; Morag 2012). The familiar dramatic motif of a play-within-a play therefore functions as an allegory for a settler’s ‘acting out;’ the tendency by which according to LaCapra ‘one reincarnates or relives the past in an unmediated transferential process that subjects one to possess haunting objects and to compulsively repeated incursions of traumatic residues’ (1997: 239–240). Acting out is the result of repression of the traumatic event or, in other words, its disavowal. It is differentiated in psychoanalysis and trauma studies from ‘working through,’ which comes from awareness to and recognition of the workings of trauma and, therefore ‘reactivates, but does not simply reincarnate or make live again, the traumas of the past’ (242). In this sense, the play Siman with its allegorisation of acting-out is an exceptional gesture towards a working-through of settler perpetrator’s trauma. Simultaneously, Gardi’s self-awareness of the appropriation of the records of the atrocities committed against the women of Hoonin through the delegation of his self-scorn to the lines of character Woman D does little to absolve Gardi from the questionable ethics of the text as a whole.

Perhaps due to the dead-end arrived at in the second scene, Siman’s third and final part turns to the paradox of settlement and archive in quite the same literality by which these of settler-decolonisation and perpetrator’s trauma are treated. It sets-up a Kafkaesque debate between two officials of the ‘Department of Supervision and Archiving’ with two officials from the ‘Department of Preservation and Commemoration.’ While assuming the protagonist’s role in the two previous scenes, Gardi is no longer on stage here and the focus of action shifts from him as a settler-subject to the metaphorised settler-archive as it is embodied by the museum. The four archetypical characters bear the names of matriarchs and patriarchs of the Jewish tradition: Sarah, Avraham, Yosef, and Rachel. Each of the characters’ names bears the qualifier ‘pseudonym’ added to it, aligning them with the nameless characters from the previous scene. While the complete namelessness of the latter is a marker of the negative space that endures in the archive, pseudonym here serves to symbolise both the protective anonymity of those in

94 What is translated here as Archive is in the Hebrew source ‘g’niza’ (ג’نزָה), which relates etymologically to the religious practice of storing old or damaged sacred items in a synagogue before burying them in the ground. The Hebrew word for archive ‘ginzah’ derives from it, and as a verb ‘ganaz’ (ג.נ.ג) means to archive but also to censor, eliminate, bury, or to hide.
power as well as the generalisation of the settler or settler culture (representing a kind of ‘every-settler’). The four characters argue whether to destroy the museum’s building as a threat to state-security, concerned that one day its stones might reveal its secrets (Gardi 2012: 171), or rather to preserve it as a monument of prime historical and cultural importance and pride (173). I bring here the full sequence of the first part of the debate to demonstrate Gardi’s style and his deployment of the archive he created in the course of his research in the interrogation of the conflict of the settler-archive:

PSEUDONYM SARAH
Dear colleagues. With all the genuine respect I truly have for the cultural conservation, this building was declared as dangerous to the state. A foreign agent almost. By the orders of the Department of Supervision and Archiving, I am instructed to demolish it. I must ask you to leave this place. This is a military exclusion zone.

PSEUDONYM RACHEL
What? Demolish? How come demolish! Impossible! Look at this building tradition. Look at the beautiful structure. Look at the pediment. The arches. Look at this building, an inseparable part of our built assets. Of our material culture. A site which meaning is nothing short of national! No, I will not allow it. As Head of Administration of Documentation, Rehabilitation and Guidance I herein forbid you, dear colleague, from damaging the building.

PSEUDONYM SARAH
Sorry, I am sorry. With all due respect for culture and tradition, with all the importance I do grant to the values of conservation, rehabilitation, and commemoration, there is nothing more beautiful than the freedom, to express oneself responsibly. And here the architect has failed. Regretfully, here the establishment has failed. A stone may call out from the wall and without any responsibility. Did you ever hear of security considerations? There is no choice, demolition is due.

[she lifts one of the sledge-hammers. Pseudonym Rachel rushes towards her, holding to one of the handles]

PSEUDONYM RACHEL
Head of Department of Supervision and Archiving! Head of Department of Information Management! The poet had already written

[Declaim poetically]
Beneath the stone peals
Arteries rest and tissues and organs
Primordial silence prevails to no border

[She becomes silence, sighs]

PSEUDONYM SARAH
[looking at her with disbelief]
Primordial silence? Primordial silence? What are these nonsenses? What primordial silence? Here, on the brink of a scream, every stone is a pending riot and might express things with unforgivable irresponsibility. The aim: breaking into the village Hoonin and kill a few men! To take hostages! To blow up a few of the houses and to burn what can be burnt.95

PSEUDONYM YOSEF
Head of Department of Elimination and Exposure. I beg you. The walls have ears, as they say.

PSEUDONYM AVRAHAM
[Turns to Pseudonym Yosef reproachingly]
They were women’s corpses. They were not together. They were scattered. After three or four days we went again to look for corpses and I found a fourth not far from the places where we found the three corpses. Next to it stood a fox. A horrible smell came from it.
[Looks at Pseudonym Yosef and Pseudonym Rachel reproachingly]
Well?!
Do you see?!

PSEUDONYM SARAH
You can see now can’t you, honourable ones? That we have no choice. Head of Department of Documentation and Commemoration. Head of Department of Archiving and Guidance. With all the pain that it truly involves, we have no choice. In my capacity as Head of Division of Documentation Elimination and Exposure, I must say here, demolition is due.

PSEUDONYM YOSEF
But remember! Remember the national pride! The feelings that tremble in the words of those who came before us. Our spiritual ancestors. The heavy Hoonin-stones that were carried and transferred by the toil of our comrades to the patch of the uprooted vineyard – they are Beit-Ussishkin to-be. Cast upon the empty plot as the dry bones of Ezekiel and awaits ye who may join them one to the other, crust them with cement-skin and iron-tendons, and will erect the house from them – a culture house for our kvutza (kibbutz) and a memorial to Menachem Osishkin (174-5).

The dramaturgical set-up of the scene as a farcical confrontation between two opposing sides is already undermined by the confusion and perpetual change of the made-up names of the different official departments and roles. There is a hardly a difference between Pseudonym Sarah as in charge of archiving, and Pseudonym Rachel as in charge of documentation. The blurring of the distinctions between the sides intensifies later in the dialogue, implying the interpretation of the settler-archive as inherently sustained by these opposing needs rather than tending towards or succumbing to one or the other. The integration of poetry, biblical references

95 The last line of this section as well as the next lines of Pseudonym Avraham are directly quoted from the Hagana’s operation-order which Gardi located in the IDF.
and archival documents confirm Giannachi’s understanding of the archive as an apparatus or deep map. Gardi’s experimentation with playing settlement interests and archiving interests against each other through the question of destroying or persevering the museum, leads to an understanding that if the museum is to be demolished so should the highway leading to the kibbutz as it was built with the same stones (177), and later ‘some parts of the Naphtali mountain-ridge’ (178). It is here that Gardi’s landscape-drag reaches its fullest manifestation, by bringing into view the long-term trajectories of settler-colonialism and means by which they orientate space, through the paradox of the settler-archive and the retrieval of its disjointed parts. Beyond this point the scene quickly deteriorates into a complete loss of meaning in a fashion evocative of playwright Eugen Ionesco’s The Bald Soprano (1950). The four characters move from rational or quasi-rational arguments to poems, songs, reciting archival records, numbers, and dates and the division into character’s roles becomes redundant (178). What started as a clear line of the settler-archive loses its way, and the reader is left disoriented as lines – of narrative, logic, space – are completely lost. As far as the independent dramaturgical analysis of the play Siman goes, it is perhaps from this state of disorientation and disalignment that Gardi suggests that decolonisation may begin.

Self-Facing Dialogue

In my reading of Gardi, I focused on retracing the means by which he orientates himself as a kibbutz-born settler subject within his engagement with the kibbutz archive and vis-á-vis its decolonisation. Unlike the Living Archive which is limited to isolated images sourced from the Giva’at Haim archive – Gardi operates in and through multiple archives and his writing style allows him to point out their connections and contingencies as parts of one apparatus. By this, his project works to expose the kibbutz as a gradual process of settler-colonialism. A process of which he is a product, as manifested in his essentially narcissistic disposition. As such, his landscape-drag is self-referential, it begins with his own body and its orientation in space and returns to it. As reflected in Siman, the engagement with records of Palestinians subjects and histories eventually appears functional for Gardi’s aim to understand himself. Their re-presence through landscape-drag is but a secondary bi-product, accessible only through close hermeneutic engagement with his text of the kind I have presented. Gardi does attempt to contact people of the Hoonin refugee community in Berlin and collaborate with them but is turned
down or ignored by them, or left feeling used as they are only interested in the materials he can provide them with about the history of their village and not in him or his project (126-7). His journey eventually concludes with a profound pessimism for the possibility of decolonisation, reconciliation, or historical justice. It is from this point of settler-colonial melancholy that I turn to the last case study of this chapter, artists Michal BarOr’s Abandoned Property project in Kibbutz Yad Mordechai.\footnote{I appropriate here a concept of the nineteenth century colonial thinker John Stuart Mill. Historian Duncan Bell identifies the notion of ‘Melancholic Colonialism’ which he describes as the state of admittance in the ‘misgivings of colonialism but the inability to reject it altogether, believing that they can be ultimately overcome’ (Bell 2012: 37). Bell notes that this approach marked a shift from the humanistic enthusiasm towards colonialism that characterised Stuart Mill’s early writings. According to him, this shift was motivated by Stuart Mill’s reckoning with ‘the pathologies of colonialism, and especially the prevalence of settler violence’ (ibid).} Coming to the kibbutz and its archive not only as non-historian but also as an outsider, BarOr removes the focus of her intervention of landscape-drag from the settler subject to the kibbutz community and its network of collective political-historical conscience.
Abandoned Property

What objects gather in our homes? We should take care to remember how such objects arrive. Whiteness is not in these objects, as a form of positive residence; rather, it is an effect of how they gather, to create an edge or even a ‘wall’ in which we dwell

(Ahmed 2006:147)

In contrast to Gardi’s self-facing dialogue, the artist Michal BarOr positions the conflict of settlement and archiving it in the gallery of Kibbutz Yad-Mordechai as a means to generate a conversation about and around it. BarOr spent six months working in the kibbutz archive, interviewing kibbutz members and inquiring about items of ‘abandoned property’ (Hebrew: ‘rekhush natooosh’; Arabic: ‘mulk maturuk’). This charged term – the title of BarOr’s exhibition – is the nomenclature given by Israeli authorities to the property of Palestinian refugees which was claimed and redistributed by the state after 1948. It is also a term used in the kibbutz internal discourse to indicate specific objects that belonged to Palestinians before 1948. BarOr’s project extends from a particular point in time, a period of six months during 1948 (from 24 May until 5 November), when the kibbutz was raided by the Egyptian army, occupied, and used by them as a military base while its residents were evacuated to a temporary residence. Upon the return to the kibbutz, kibbutz members reequipped their homes and public facilities with Palestinian property. Seventy years later, these objects form part of the kibbutz landscape, its naturalised background. Whereas Gardi’s point of departure was the stones of Beit-Ussishkin museum, BarOr begins her inquiry by cataloguing items of ‘abundant property’ which are integrated in the kibbutz’s every-day life and interrogates them as Palestinian. Marking the outcome of BarOr’s artistic process, the exhibition juxtaposed objects such as Palestinian bronze plates and traditional Arabic floor tiles hidden under a carpet, with essentially metaphorical items such as a snake’s skin and an empty tool-board, with markings of the spaces of the absent tools. I examine the means by which BarOr mediates her exceptionally unmediated approach to memory and archive, where the direct engagement with the kibbutz settler community in which she operates radically shapes her decision making and outcomes. While BarOr see herself as a visual artist, through close conversation with her and in reviewing the full making process of Abandoned Property, I reframe her intervention as a performed decolonising action in the kibbutz archive. As such, her project both foregrounds

97 In a sense, Abandoned Property is the extension of the legal-discursive dynamic which created the Mistanenim (infiltrators) that I have discussed in the introduction.
the peculiarity of the settler archive (as modelled on the kibbutz archive) with its paradoxes and porous borders, as well as testifies to the challenges, limitations, and repercussions of decolonisation in and through it.

Abandoned Property’s exhibition-text opens with the following paragraph:

The story of Kibbutz Yad Mordechai is a well written one. Like every other story that rewrites itself endlessly. It is written on road-signs in the Kibbutz, embedded in the personal biographies of its members and in canonical Zionists history books. In every conversation it floats; like oil, generating a smooth surface. When I have listened to the story repeated telling itself, it seemed to me as if the speaker’s voice I hear is accompanied by a chorus, like ghosts accompanying the story, singing along with the speaker and dictating their voice. Any deviation from this well constructed story, or […] any possibility to track any “cracks” in it, is possible only by looking astray (BarOr 2017).

Spectres, ghosts, and their associated imagery form a repeated trope in archive scholarship, whereby archives are variously configured as a cemetery (Mbembe 2002: 19), mausoleum (Stoler 2010: 18) or haunted spaces ridden with ghosts (Derrida 1995: 36, 81). Derrida specifically develops the understanding of the structure of the archive as ‘spectral,’ forming ‘a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met’ (84). Israeli artists such as filmmaker Udi Aloni (Forgiveness 2006) and the artist Ronen Edelman (‘The Ghost of Manshya Awakes’ 2007) have marked in their works the haunting quality of the Palestinian Nakba in and on Zionist settler-culture through the metaphor of the ghost. Gardi’s casting of the Macbeth witches as the women from Hoonin and even my own discussion of the spectral presence of Manshiya in the first image of the Living Archive too are related gestures. However, in the above quoted exhibition-text (taken form an article published about the exhibition), BarOr relates the quality of the spectral not to the disavowed Palestinian context of the objects in her exhibition but rather to the policing of the narrative in the stories told by her informants, ‘singing along with the speaker and dictating their voice.’ By this she indicates the workings of straightening devices, and in the following line suggests that the way to overcome them – ‘any possibility to track any “cracks”’ – is ‘possible only by looking astray’, sideways, slantwise, obliquely. Cracks serve an insightful metaphor here, representing a negative space within a wall.
The (Phenomenological) Background Story of Yad Morechai

The narrative which BarOr refers to in her text and against which background her project operates, is articulated, spatialised, and presented in the kibbutz’s museum. This museum of a kibbutz which belongs to the most leftist of kibbutz ideological factions is a telling example of the ways by which discourse, memory, and commemoration of the Holocaust participate in the settler-colonial disavowal and elimination of the indigenous, as I have discussed in the previous chapter. Kibbutz Yad Mordechai was established in 1936, near the city of Netanya on the coastal plain. It was initially named Mitzpe Yam (Heb. Sea Observatory) because of its vicinity to the sea and reflective of its role in directing boats of uncertified immigrants to Palestine in the late 1930s (‘Kibbutz Yad Mordechai’, Website of Kibbutz Yad Mordechai Museum). In November 1943, the kibbutz had moved to a new location, between Gaza and the Palestinian town of Magdal, where today stands the city of Ashkelon. The kibbutz then took a new name, Yad Mordechai (Heb. Mordechai-Memorial), after Mordechai Anielewicz, the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising that took place six months before the resettlement. As far as names represent a form of archiving, the change of location and the adjacent change of name marks also an alignment of settlement and landscape in the original ‘Mitzpe Yam’ with the fate of the European Jewry in the Second World War and particularly the trope of heroic resistance linked with Anielewicz. The kibbutz’s museum is accordingly named ‘From Holocaust to Revival,’ dedicated to both the commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as well as to the establishment of the State of Israel, problematically claiming it ‘presents the history of the Jewish people in the first half of the twentieth century’ (museum website). The considerable work of aligning these two separate events phenomenologically is expressed in the spatial arrangement of the museum and detailed on its website. The museum utilises both temporal and landscape drag in its work to materialise the line between the kibbutz history and its namesake. Deliberately non-chronological, the first of two parts of the museum:

begins with a photograph of Jewish fighters from 1948 who liberated Kibbutz Yad-Mordechai from Egyptian forces in the War of Independence. After viewing the photograph and the rifles and guns which were used by the Israeli defenders, and on the opposite wall the much heavier bombs used by the Egyptian attackers – one descends to the basement which presents the Jewish culture of Eastern Europe to which the fighters belonged. The descent by stairs takes us back in time to a Jewish world which was, and is no more, a world rich in spirit and material which existed in exile for 2000 years. In the dark, gloomy basement, we see seven columns of the Jewish life in exile (ibid).
The line thus enacted theatricalises in reverse the Zionist trope of Aliya (ascendance), by which immigration of Jews to Palestine is imagined as going-up. The visitors in the first part of Yad Mordechai Museum descend from a moment of glorious victory of Zionist fighters in 1948 War into the ‘gloomy basement’ of 2000 years of a ‘Jewish world that was and no more.’ As the movement to the basement is framed as ‘take[ing] us back in time,’ 1948 is deemed contemporary, in line with the settler-tendency to conflate origin and presence: the temporal difference works to reveal conditions of arrival, suggesting ‘where the fighters’ – framed as contemporary – ‘came from.’ This phenomenological device is practiced here as much as it does in the works of Gardi and BarOr, interfering with straightening devices of conventions of time and space in the making of settler-ontology. This process is further intensified in the second part of the museum – ‘Revival’ – which:

begins with the story of the immigration of thousands of Holocaust survivors to Palestine of the British Mandate. The struggle against the British occupiers during the years 1945-1948 is shown in the photographs of ships of “Illegal Immigrants” and the establishment of 11 new settlements in the Negev on Yom Kippur night 1946. The year 1947 is characterized by the struggle and guarding of water pipelines in the Negev (ibid).

This rather striking paragraph tightly aligns an immigration of Holocaust survivors (who ‘ascend’ from Europe just as the museum-visitor from the basement) with British occupation of Palestine, intensive settlement, and a struggle to protect water pipelines. The image of the space that emerges leaves virtually no room to imagine Palestinian presence, save the last line, where one might wonder who is it that the pipelines need to be guarded from in 1947. As we will see, Palestinian indigeneity thus archived as a negative space in the settler museum as in the settler archive is seminal to BarOr’s intervention.

The two parts of the museum are connected by a detailed and vivid reconstruction of the Warsaw Ghetto Bunker at 18 Mila Street (Figure 27). Along with the positioning of an enlarged photograph of Mordechai Anielewicz right next to photographs from the first five years of the kibbutz between its relocation in 1943 and its evacuation in 1948, the museum establishes a highly decontextualised comparison between the reality of Ghetto fighters who organised and fought against their Nazi executioners and the kibbutz members who withheld the Egyptian attack on their kibbutz for six days before evacuating, in order to return to it six months later.
In the context of settler-colonial relations, this conflation does more than simply orientate the violence that kibbutz settlers experienced and participated in as an inevitable evil, readily comparable with the kind inflicted by the Nazi genocide on Jews in Europe. This imagined front(line) of kibbutz members and ghetto fighters is implicitly pitched against the image of the Palestinians of the villages and towns that neighboured Yad Mordechai before 1948 who flee their houses during the war and, therefore, are seen as cowardly and perhaps unworthy of their land.

Figure 27: A reconstruction of the Warsaw Ghetto Bunker at 18 Mila Street is located at the centre of the museum. ‘From Holocaust to Revival’ exhibition in Yad-Mordechai. Sourced from the museum’s website, accessed January 2019. Photographer unknown.

Figure 28: The area of Yad-Mordechai (centre-left) and four of the Palestinian villages in its vicinity that were destroyed in 1948: Hirbiya (top-left), Beit Jira (top-centre), Deri Suneid (bottom-left) and
This assertion is only implicit as there is no direct engagement with the existence nor the destruction of these villages in the museum. This sentiment however was expressed repeatedly in the conversations BarOr conducted in the kibbutz archives with senior kibbutz members when directly asked about it through the discussion of the objects of Abandoned Property.

While the memory of the occupation of the kibbutz by the Egyptian army is clearly centralised and foregrounded in the kibbutz narrative as it is portrayed by the museum, the experience of violent evacuation and becoming refugees of war is one deeply and genuinely rooted in the memory and postmemory of families in Yad Mordechai. It is a situation which somewhat problematises Veracini’s dichotomies of settler dispossessors and indigenous dispossessed. Yad-Mordechai’s part in the advancement of the gradual process of Zionist settler-colonialism notwithstanding, these traumatic experiences are not to be dismissed nor regraded a perpetrator’s trauma, especially not when attempting decolonising interventions through and in kibbutz settler-archive. BarOr in fact marked this experience of dispossessing and uprooting as a point of departure to explore the role of and possibility for solidarity in her project. In place of the conflation with Ghetto fighters, in her conversation (and to a lesser extent in the exhibition) she offered the possibility of identification of kibbutz members with the Palestinians of the destroyed villages who also lost their homes and their lands in the war, but unlike them could never regain them.

**Reassembling Objects**

In the making of Abandoned Property BarOr followed what she refers to as a ‘material trail,’ she writes:

> I was curious as to how those who had the experience of being refugees relate to the property of refugees who did not return. How objects acquire a kind of refugee-genetics, which they pass on to whoever holds them. The project can be thought of through its name, “Abandoned Property” – an essentially oxymoronic name, as once something is abandoned it is no longer anyone’s property (BarOr 2017).

Her relative position as an outsider and an artist allowed BarOr to sustain an active dialogue with the kibbutz community. Complementing her archival research, in the course of her work
she met several people, most of whom were senior kibbutz members, relating in one way or another to the work of the kibbutz archive. Rather than inquiring directly about pre-1948 records of the neighbouring Palestinian villages and their inhabitants in the archive, or questioning her informants’ private recollections about them, BarOr targeted objects. Whereas memory-based personal testimonies are readily policed by what BarOr identifies as ‘a choir of ghosts,’ and what I read as straightening devises working to gloss over inconsistencies with normalised lines of perception, objects carry their own ontology. As it appears from BarOr’s work, through interrogating the individual histories of Palestinian objects vis-à-vis the affective charges and meanings invested in them through their archiving in the kibbutz life and landscape, their disavowed and invisible context comes into view. The reconstruction of these objects’ conditions of arrival (to the kibbutz; into being) in BarOr’s conversations with senior kibbutz members immediately reflects on the kibbutz landscape and its surroundings, dragging them up.

Objects of ‘abandoned property’ are relatively easy to detect as they stand out, oblique in their antiquity and decoration among the standardised, functional, striped-down – or in other cases modern – material environment of the kibbutz. They are also a source of pride to their elderly owners, as they signify seniority and relation to the kibbutz’s founding; ‘nativising’ them. This quality of disalignment of the objects highlights the significance of phenomenological devices in the work of naturalise their presence and disavowing their political-historical origins. This way, a conversation that begins by drawing attention to the decorated floor-tiles that are integrated in some of the public buildings begins with several speculations. Some say it was brought from Jaffa with the kibbutz members when they returned to the kibbutz after the war, others raise the possibility they were taken from houses in the near-by villages. As if from nowhere, a new idiosyncratic term arises in the conversation, The Theft (Hagneva), a category of objects specifically taken from the destroyed village of Beit-Hanoon:

I: I think [the floor tiles] came from the abandoned property in Yafa, but how can I be sure it’s not from the Beit-Hannon Theft.
A: This can’t be.
I: They caught Mendel with the GMC full of chairs, enough for the entire kibbutz.
A: Is it theft? Of course, its theft, in those days they thought everything is allowed.

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98 This description and the following ones are based on the recordings of conversations the artist has conducted with members of Kibbutz Yad Mordechai and later shared with me. They were never presented, exhibited, nor published in their original form.
99 GMC – a small track.
I: And a tractor and equipment.
A: In 1956, after the...they went to bring things from there. There used to be an agricultural college there, they took the entire laboratory [equipment] and moved it here, to the laboratory of the school here. They even took a tractor from there.
I: They took the guys from here to conquer Beit-Hanoon.
A: What didn’t they bring from there, all sorts of stuff, go figure. They probably took more things, there are stories aplenty.

This dialogue fragment, which I have transcribed verbatim, is uncomfortable. The ease by which the kibbutz members discuss the bounty of destroyed villages and its integration into kibbutz life is strange, and it appears the speakers themselves are somewhat embarrassed to face the implied contradictions between this reality and ideologies of progressive humanism with which they were raised. Nonetheless, the existence of Beit Hanoon, with its educational institutions and material world, is archived in the negative space between subject and objects of the kibbutz. Its existence surfaces as a result of the interrogation of the conditions of arrival of these objects – historically, politically, materially and therefore, phenomenologically – a dynamic I referred to earlier as a phenomenological chain reaction. While still invisible at the background of the conversation, the conflation of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters with the kibbutz members as the totalised history of the kibbutz community and its moment of founding violence must also come into view as constructed and ideological.

Already in the ambivalent tone of the speakers, the work of rationalisation, guilt, and shame can be discerned, immediately attempting to straighten out the oblique truths and restore the ‘correct’ image of self and landscape (as reflecting the self). One mechanism repeatedly deployed in the conversations is the marking of a difference between the kibbutz and the state, or the army as its extension (‘they ran away because they were afraid of the army’), by which the kibbutz emerges as a negation thereof, but also as small, powerless, and insignificant in the face of the manoeuvres of national history. It is thus marked as dwelling outside the national framework. In other times, the abandoned property is referred to as ‘the property of the enemy’ (Meiri 2016), and the entitlement to it is related to the occupation of the Egyptian army of the kibbutz and due compensation for the property taken or destroyed by Egyptian soldiers. Within the latter, the Palestinian presence disappears between an Israeli national entity and an Egyptian one. In both perspectives, nationalism as a phenomenological paradigm serves to obfuscate settler-colonial relations and long-term process, confirming the fundamental premise of settler-colonial paradigm as well as this work. The objects however sustain a certain resistance to these
obfuscating mechanisms, offering their oblique presence as an irrefutable testimony; as a potential of decolonisation. This is partly due to their factual materiality and partly because of their indexical relation to individual indigenous others; they belonged to someone whose body is rendered perceivable through the connection to the object. The challenge now faced by the artists is exactly the one of landscape-drag: how may representational – visual or other - artistic interventions suspend settler straightening devices and amplify the ontological resistance of the object to them, thus allowing for disavowed indigenous presence to endure in a settler space?

**What Cannot be Brought to Mind, Only it Does Come**

![Figure 29: The arrangement of objects in the gallery (right to left): empty workshop wall, closet from ‘abandoned property’, images of bronze trays found in the kibbutz fields, image of the painted floor tiles underneath a carpet, decorated clay pots found in the kibbutz fields. ‘Abandoned Property,’ Dana Gallery 2016. Photograph by Michal BarOr](image)

BarOr exhibited Abandoned Property in Dana Gallery of Kibbutz Yad-Mordechai, which was the commissioning and funding body of the work. Several hundred kilometres distant from the artistic centres of Tel-Aviv or Jerusalem, the peripheral exhibition space maintained the contingency of the intervention’s final outcome with its making process within the kibbutz community and with the assistance of its members. The gallery space thus emerges as an institutional as well as epistemological middle ground between the outside of the Living Archive and the immanent space of the novel *Stone Paper*. As such, it serves a privileged meeting point of the communal and the public with the subjective-individual agency of the
artist. From the perspective of the settler archive, BarOr’s exhibition renders the gallery a part of its apparatus, alongside the landscape and the museum, individual kibbutz members, buildings, and objects.

An antithesis to the images of stuffed archives with shelves overflowing with files or the cabinet of curiosities, the prototype of the modern museum, packed with assorted artefacts, Abandoned Property is curated sparingly and efficiently, where a few selected objects are positioned spaciously in the gallery. BarOr evidently controls the mediation of the object to the viewer rather than leaving it exposed and unsupervised. Echoing Gardi’s method, she draws attention to the mediation itself, to the action of exposing and exhibiting the objects. One expression of it is the reliance on enlarged images of the objects rather than on their physical presence. Out of all of the exhibited objects, only one empty wooden closet is both present in the gallery space and identified as ‘abandoned property’ while others such as bronze palates or floor tiles are photographed. The all too common preoccupation with the authenticity of the object is marginalised in this way in favour of a consideration of the objects as mnemonics involved in phenomenological processes. BarOr foregrounds the negative space of the objects, that to which she referred to as ‘cracks,’ presenting those people whose clothes are not in the closet, whose food is not on the plates and whose feet do not walk on the floor. The art critique Galya Yahav addressed this curatorial technique of the artists in pointing out that many of the photographs include gesturing hands, repeating a ‘common photographic trope of the hand in the frame that presents something to the camera’ (Yahav 2016). Of the image presenting the decorated floor tiles (around which the aforementioned discussion revolved) Yahav writes: ‘a hand lifts a wall-to-wall carpet, revealing painted tiles in a frame of a diagonal tearing-up of the surface, an archæological exposure of what lies beneath, as a visual embodiment of the unconscious, of disavowal’ (ibid).

Another representational technique that BarOr shares with Gardi is that of the juxtaposition of the Palestinian objects from the kibbutz with metaphorical artefacts such as a snake’s skin or a large image of the wall of a workshop with the markings of the designated spaces of absent tools (figure 30). The latter is identified by Yahav as the key object of the exhibition, and her reading of it effectively summarises some of the essential elements I have identified in the way the three interventions explored in this chapter utilise negative space of the archive to resist settler-straightening devices:
it is a wall which is all a mechanism, a protocol. Taking and returning based on trust and order, as customary in communal life. Only that all the objects are missing [...] they are present-absent, they can be nothing else but themselves (as they would not fit in a different place or outline), entirely anonymous. We know them but have no idea where they are. Their spectral presence can be identified only through the forensic-like outline marked around their corps, they are at once are and aren’t […] when one looks at the image long enough it gradually turns into a blind map of a disaster area, perhaps a map divided to the section of the blocks and the section of the crematoria. This is of course a crude exaggeration, the visual and conceptual equation between the neglected workshop to the absent-presence of 1948 with its abandoned assets to that which took place in Europe few years earlier […] it cannot be brought to mind (only it does come) (ibid).

Far-reaching and provocative as Yahav’s comparison may be, it does mirror the conflation of realities of Holocaust and Zionism staged by the kibbutz museum. While the museum weaves this comparison into a national narrative, Yahav conflates the two in a reading that questions and undermines its totalisation even if still oriented by it. Either way, her reading confirms BarOr’s metaphorical object as an effective disorientation device, one that allows Yahav to perceive the presence of oblique relations that normally fail to be extended in settler discursive as well as physical space. It is these objects aligned with kibbutz-archived Palestinian objects that function as the ‘cracks’ BarOr describes, through which the viewer can see deviations from the official, normalised story-line. Significantly, both BarOr and Gardi utilise such surrogate objects and materials in their works, marking the direct (straight) confrontation with records, objects, or stories (memories) that expose settler-colonial relations as insufficient and evasive, or, perhaps on the contrary, as overwhelming and therefore unrepresentable.

Perhaps for these reasons the phenomenological method of retracing and reconstructing the objects’ conditions of arrival that served BarOr in the making process is not enacted directly by her in the exhibition. Instead, along with the two types of objects – Palestinian objects and metaphorical objects – she presents black and white archive photographs taken by the kibbutz returnees after the war: images of the kibbutz destroyed after the bombings of the Egyptian army, an image of a woman looking through leftovers scattered in the defence trenches around the kibbutz. Along with them is presented a document in which listed the items that the kibbutz wishes to receive from the governmental agency that deals with the distribution of ‘abandoned property’ (Figure 32). While the Palestinian objects appear in their anonymous peculiarity, mediated through metaphorical objects, the ones to appear as the subjects of the violence and
dispossession of war, are kibbutz members, personified through the image of the woman in the ditch as returned refugees.

This can be problematic on several levels. Firstly, the assumption of symmetry risks the perpetration of a national paradigm of the conflict by which settler-colonial violence is obfuscated by imagined to be taking place between two national entities on an essentially equal footing. Even if this does partially represent the reality of the 1948 and its aftermath, no images of Palestinian refugees are included in the exhibition, leaving the comparison (if ever intended) partial and imbalanced. However, as BarOr states that a central research question of her project

Figure 30 (top left): Board of tools from a workshop. ‘Abandoned Property,’ Dana Gallery 2016. Photograph by Michal BarOr.

Figure 31 (top right): Picture of a kibbutz member after the return. ‘Abandoned Property,’ Dana Gallery 2016. Photographer unknown.

Figure 32 (bottom): A letter to the bureau of Abandoned Property from the kibbutz, July 1948. ‘Abandoned Property,’ Dana Gallery 2016. Photograph by Michal BarOr.
was to understand ‘how those who had the experience of being refugees relate to the property of refugees who did not return’ (BarOr 2017), the inclusion of visual reminder of that period in the kibbutz’s life can be seen as strategic. It appeals to a sense of solidarity and personal identification as a basis for decolonisation, where local identity and history may overpower national generalisations. This recognition was arrived at several times in BarOr’s conversations with kibbutz members, when several interviewees acknowledged that Palestinians who were defined as infiltrators were in fact coming back for their property, refusing to abandon it. These disavowed contexts of the ‘abandoned property’ as well as the critical differences between the conditions of Palestinian refugees and the members of Yad Mordechai (both products of the process of settler-colonialism) were neither developed nor interrogated in the final exhibition; they remain in the background.

The decision to contain the agonistic potential of the exhibition – expressed for example in the artist’s refrain from using the recordings of her conversations with kibbutz members and most of the material they contained – was partly related to a certain crisis in trust that took place towards the end of the project. In order to expand her research, a few weeks before the opening BarOr met an historian from Tel-Aviv University who researches the history of the Ali Kassem farm in which the members of Yad Mordechai lived during the months of the war. While not disclosing anything in their short meeting, immediately afterwards he contacted many of BarOr’s key collaborators in the kibbutz, telling them she had a hidden motive to sue them for the Palestinian property and warned them not to make any connections with her. In a series of tense meetings that followed, BarOr was required to assure kibbutz members that the sole purpose of her project was the exhibition and that she had no intention to sue or shame anyone. The exhibition was indeed executed but many of her interviewees asked to remain anonymous or not to be mentioned at all, feeling they needed to protect themselves. BarOr had to amend or withdraw various plans she had for the exhibition. The suggestive or even enigmatic quality of the final exhibition should then be seen not only as an aesthetic and ideological strategy but also as one adjusted to the reality of the work in this particular locale of the kibbutz archive. I include this seemingly external episode in the reading of the project as it presents a crucial example for the workings of straightening devices beyond the symbolic or aesthetic level. The bringing into view and acknowledging settler-colonial relations may begin, as I argue, on the level of perception, but its repercussions exceed into very real political, social, and material realm, as the fear of a lawsuit indicates. The resistance BarOr faced in her work is nonetheless
an indication of both the timeliness and volatility of decolonising interventions in the settler-archive.
Conclusion

The comparison of the three cases of appropriation, adaptation, and presentation of visual and textual documents and objects that were archived in the kibbutz, whether intentionally through the institution of the archive or not, reveals the active potential of negative space in the settler-archive. I have demonstrated the way this potential is used for landscape-drag by settlers themselves to advance utopian representations of space and ideological orientation of settler-subjects. In building on the previous chapter and its theorisation of a settler-archive, the present chapter had reflected on three different engagements with kibbutz archives. The experiences of Gardi, BarOr, and myself (in the Living Archive) collide in the encounter of negative spaces in which Palestinian history and memory are archived. In a fashion parallel to my understating of ethnic drag as inevitably interfering with settler processes of naturalisation of the colonial process, objects and documents of the kibbutz and that are preserved in the kibbutz archive ‘open cracks,’ to paraphrase BarOr; reorient perception. This holds whether this objects and documents are positioned to do so - as demonstrated in BarOr and Gardi’s works – or when intended as a reassuring mirror and testimony of provenances, as is the case with the Living Archive.

Towards the exit of Yad Mordechai museum, photographs of the settlements that were established after 1948 in the vicinity of the kibbutz are presented. Under the caption of the Hebrew name of each new settlement listed in brackets the name of the Palestinian town or village that existed on that land before. In considering Husserl’s concept of bracketing-out (see footnote 12), while excluded from the order of the main focus of the museum’s exhibition, the Palestinian names are archived in the brackets, turning a state-funded museum of Holocaust rebellion and Zionist heroism into one of the only sites in the world to commemorate Palestinian history. The following chapter continues the investigation of the relevance of the phenomenological mechanism of drag to the study of settler culture, through exploring the making process of a performance that is based on materials of a settler-archive, which unlike the examples in this chapter, is intimately related to the urban metropolis of Tel-Aviv. With this, the focus also shifts from museums, literature and visual art to theatre and dramaturgy.
6. ARCHITECTURE DRAG
Who Killed Arlossoroff? The Musical!

As I argue in Chapters 4 and 5, in settler-societies that rely on the obfuscation of their colonial constitution and the disavowal of colonial violence, archives are Janus-faced. While offering a vital source for reaffirming imagery of settler-identity and provenance, they simultaneously (and inevitably) record the traces of indigenous existence, history and agency. This duality stands at the centre of my reflexive analysis of an archive-based immersive performance in Tel-Aviv. Through unpacking its making-process and reception, I test my theorisation of the settler-archive as inherently paradoxical, examining how this trait translates into and informs archive-based performance making. Shifting the focus from landscape to architecture, I theorise the way performance interacts with urban environment to produce an effect of resistance to straightening devices, performing architecture drag. While the case studies of landscape drag explored interventions experienced by a spectator (audience), the analysis of a performance-making process as architecture drag allows me to interrogate parallel dynamics from the perspective of maker (performer). The underlying question then becomes ‘what does it mean to *drag* a building through performance?’ Simultaneously, I use the reflection on the performance to sketch out conditions of and for decolonisation through the archive, by means of decolonisation of the archive, in the context of settler-culture. By this, I question whether the two are necessarily contingent, consequential to one another, or at all possible.

From Kibbutz Landscape Drag to Urban Architecture Drag

In June 2018, a group of around one-hundred people gathered in Bialik Square in Tel-Aviv and reenacted the funeral procession of the Zionist politician Dr Haim Arlossoroff, an event that took place at the same site eighty-five years earlier, after Arlossoroff’s mysterious murder. This was the opening scene of the immersive archive-based performance *Who Killed Arlossoroff? The Musical!* (*Who Killed* henceforth) created by the director and designer Yulia Ginis and myself. Known as ‘the first political assassination in Zionist history,’ the archive of the unresolved murder of Arlossoroff consists of no less than seven competing theories concerning the identity of the murderers and their motivations. The show amplified and capitalised on the material’s inherent polyphony and discord, taking place in the building of Tel-Aviv’s old town...
hall (Beit Ha’Ir) in what was the city’s throbbing heart in the 1930s. The gesture of reenactment that opened the show with the public procession of Arlossorff’s dummy in a coffin encapsulated a sense of the transcendental embodied experience associated with archives and other sites of memory; the trans-temporal link between our body and bodies that lived in the past. As anthropologist Katherine Verdery succinctly observes in her study of *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* in the post-Soviet era, ‘bodies have the advantage of concreteness that nonetheless transcends time, making the past immediately present […], their corporeality makes them an important means of localising a claim’ (1999: 27). In *Who Killed*, the building of the old town hall served as a portal through which this connection was enacted. As Derrida reminds us in *Archive Fever*, the etymological origins of the archive are rooted in the figure of the house (1995: 2), the site in which records are kept. We as makers drew attention to the iconic façade of Beit Ha’Ir a gesture of theatricalisation of the archive; bringing it into view as an object. This allegorical equation between the building and the archive implied that the interventions and gestures performed in the course of the show on one - were readable as relating to the other. Entering the building meant entering the archive, literally and physically, as well as symbolically and discursively.

The initial choice to engage two distinctive, even contradictory, forms – immersive and musical – in the treatment of one of Israel’s most notorious and contentious historical myths partly originated from our desire to corporealise this ‘entrance’ to the archive. This choice inevitably surfaced a series of aesthetic, logistical, as well as political questions, surrounding the use and the modes of re-presentation of archival material. While, allegedly, the utilisation of performance to bypass the archive’s ‘gate-keepers’ – allowing people to access its contents – in itself is often regarded as a decolonising act (Azoulay 2014), the specific geopolitical and historical contexts of the project pose a set of far more demanding considerations regarding what it means to decolonise an archive, or perform decolonising interventions with an archive. Can the restaging of historical documents amend historical injustices or is it destined to merely echo them and thus reinforce their oppressive charge? What are the conditions for the evocation of past realities through archival documents to be used by audiences as means to make sense, question, reimagine, or even challenge their contemporary reality?

This chapter will therefore unpack how we used the dramaturgical strategies of participatory and relational immersive theatre on the one hand, and the hyperbolic-glamorous and camp elements of musical theatre on the other to address these questions. Returning to Freeman’s
‘temporal drag’ (2010) and Ahmed’s analytical framework of *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), I will argue that by ‘glittering the archive’ the performance not only provided a space for creative and playful contact with past realities but also modelled critical interpretation of and intervention in the political present of the archive. In that, my investigation shifts the focus from ‘how we decolonise archives’ to ‘what can we do with archives in performance in order to decolonise?’

The shift of scenery from my ancestral kibbutzim in the two previous chapters to Tel-Aviv in the present chapter is not as abrupt or arbitrary as it may seem. Established in 1909, the Zionist neighbourhood of Jaffa that turned into the city of Tel-Aviv-Yafo after 1948 shares its year of inauguration with the first Kvutza. Thus, the socialistic-rural-agricultural kibbutz movement and bourgeois-urban-industrial Tel-Aviv simultaneously evolved as parallel modes of Zionist settlement and colonization (Near 2007). Rather than being antithetical to one another, in the first half of the twentieth century the kibbutz’s efficiently organised frontier avant-garde and Tel-Aviv’s centralisation of political power and capital sustained the backbone of the settlement of Palestine. Kibbutz archives and the archives of Tel-Aviv therefore should be seen as complementary and contingent, susceptible to the same (or at least similar) tendencies, negative spaces, and contradictions.

The historical connection between the locale of Kibbutz Giva’at Haim and Arlossoroff’s Tel-Aviv revealed itself to me in a much more personal and contemporary manner as a result of the making of *Who Killed*. Kibbutz Giva’at Haim was established in 1932, the year in which Haim Arlossoroff was murdered. It is after him that the kibbutz took its name (literally, ‘Haim’s hill’). Arlossoroff’s name and myth are to me first and foremost part of that deep map of the kibbutz which weaves together landscape, history, identity and affect. This ontologically-primordial personal relation might have motivated my decision to propose the story of Arlossoroff’s murder mystery as the archive of a performance project, though I was not aware of it at the time. Only when I began to prepare the archival material for the show did I discover in one of the lesser known theories regarding Arlossoroff’s assassination (‘the Communist Theory’) that a potential motivation for the murder was his involvement in the expulsion of Palestinians from their lands in Wadi Al Hawarith, in order to make the land available for Jewish settlement.\(^{100}\) Not in any official use today, Wadi Al Hawarith as we were told as

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\(^{100}\) Cited in the research carried out by Illan Sheizaf for the production. Sheizaf relied on the book *Adoomim* (Reds) by historian Shmuel Dotan.
children in the kibbutz, is the Arab name for what we call in Hebrew Emek-Hefer, the area in which Kibbutz Giva’at Haim is located; its lands may be the very ones that are referenced in the Arlossoroff archive. The lines of speculative connections between historical archives and my own body – itself deemed archive in this way – reveal disavowed systems and chronologies of settlement as a slow, on-going, and self-obfuscating process. The violent historical-political connection between the rural kibbutz and the busy city, routinely relegated to the background, is thus brought into ‘being.’ Who Killed therefore forms a direct continuation to the theorisation of settler-archive by means of performance-making and the contemplation of drag as a phenomenological technique inherent to settler-colonialism and its decolonisation.

Architecture Drag

In the previous chapter, I discussed the Living Archive in terms of landscape-drag, addressing its phenomenological work in resisting straightening devices, exposing disavowed colonial dynamics and potentially opening space for ‘queer time’ (Freeman 2009: x). Turning to the example of Who Killed, I proceed with the exploration of phenomenological resistance, this time in the work of the performance’s artistic devices and dramaturgical techniques in destabilising the ways by which the historical building of Beit Ha’Ir is perceived. Similar to the dynamic of the Living Archive with and through the kibbutz landscape, by complementing the architectural site of the building, the immersive performance of Who Killed works to bring to the foreground the building’s conditions of arrival. These are conditions of settler-colonialism, routinely relegated to the background through the labour of settler-culture, being
straightened-up, glossed-over, disavowed in and through the repetition of lines that make up the city. In writing about religious festivals as generating urban image-making, urban scholar Sukanya Krishnamurthy observes the potential of public events to transform the perception of the city. She notes that ‘using the public environment to be enacted upon, reinforces the collective consciousness of the place and the people […] the intertwining of the real and storied world […] generates] a spectacle that transforms the urban landscape from a space of everyday use to a dynamic stage, where an alternate imagery of the city plays out’ (2016:139). While Krishnamurthy studies the workings of Hindu festival processions on the perceptions of the urban landscape in Bangalore, the process of interrupting the invisibility of the city’s conditions of arrival by means of enacting exceptional (festive) narratives (religious, ideological, historical) becomes relevant in the case of *Who Killed* due to Beit Ha’Ir’s implication in settler disavowal.

Beit Ha’Ir is part of the Bialik Square Project of urban conservation and heritage which encompasses several other buildings. The website of Beit Ha’Ir charts a timeline that suggests a narrative of resurrection and return to glory, a renaissance. Initially intended as a private hotel, the building served the Tel-Aviv city council as a town hall since its opening in 1925 until 1965, when the town hall moved to its present residence (website of Beit Ha’ir Museum 2019). When it ceased housing the municipal administration and government, the building served as a museum for the city for twenty years. By 2001, all that was left in it was the city archive which elucidated little to no public interest (ibid). Beit Ha’Ir’s website emphasises the
state of negligence and disarray the building was in before it was revived in 2009 as part of Tel-Aviv centenary celebrations and, significantly, as a direct result of the declaration of the White City Project by UNESCO in 2003.101

The latter is a conservation plan proposed to UNESCO in 2002 and approved in 2008, allocating millions of euros to the preservation of buildings in Tel-Aviv which were built in the 1930s architectural style of Bauhaus (The Modern Movement). Bialik Square is one of three proximate though separate areas that were included in the project (UNESCO World Heritage Website 2019). Beit-Ha’Ir itself however distinctly belongs to a different, earlier style of architecture (Eclectic). Simultaneously, multiple Bauhaus buildings in less central areas of Tel-Aviv (mostly its southern neighbourhoods and Jaffa) were not included in the plan, being left out of the ‘White City.’ Architect Sharon Rothbard’s close study of its plans and implementation demonstrates how while the UNESCO project was launched under the guise of conserving the unique Modern Movement’s style of architecture, in reality it served to erase the multiple complex contingencies – oblique lines and queer spaces – that make up the historically charged and politically contested urban landscape of Tel-Aviv (and) Jaffa:

in the spring of 2004, the UNESCO declaration was celebrated in Tel-Aviv with a series of events, exhibitions, ceremonies and conferences. This was a culmination of a twenty-year historiographic campaign. The implications of this historiography go far beyond the architectural history of the Modern Movement or its (dis)integration with local traditions and are rooted in the political history of the Middle East and the State of Israel. This history of Tel-Aviv, presented for a moment as an architectural history, can be seen as a part of a wider process in which the physical shaping of Tel-Aviv and its political and cultural construction are intertwined, and play a decisive role in the construction of the case, the alibi and the apologetics of the Jewish settlement across the country (Rothbard 2015: 14).

The very title of Rothbard’s book, White City Black City, alludes to the understanding of conservation as a straightening-device.102 In fact, the line that runs between the imaginary white Tel-Aviv and its binary black Jaffa is not only a pertinent example of the working of a straightening-device (as theorised by Ahmed), but one that is expressed in and orientates actual physical – topographical and architectural – space. Therefore, when we come to perform in Beit-Ha’Ir the building is already a part of a show, concealing as much as it exhibits. The

101 In my conversations with Ayelet Bitan-Shlonsky – the designer of the municipal renovation scheme of Beit Ha’Ir and the chief curator and manager of two of its museums (Beit Ha’ir and Beit Bialik) – she elaborated how derelict this area had been beforehand and how drastic the impact of the renovation of the square on the urban fabric of Tel-Aviv’s city-centre has been.

102 The book was first published in Hebrew in 2005, right at the aftermath of the declaration of the White City and was only published in English in 2015.
extent to which the performance of *Who Killed* interrupted these straightening-devices, suspending their work and allowing for disavowed material to emerge from the background (archive) and be projected on the façade, walls, and floors of Beit-Ha’Ir, to disorient the building’s alignment is the quality which I explore as architecture-drag.

Noteworthy in this respect is the initiative of Ayelet Bitan-Shlonsky, Beit Ha’Ir’s curator, to allocate only one floor of the building to a permanent historical exhibition while dedicating the other three to a gallery of ‘urban art’. This arrangement allows Bitan-Shlonsky to invite interventions of artists and performers in the building; affording exceptional creative freedom and resources on one hand, and inevitable proximity to the building’s officially-narrated history on the other. Her curatorial approach – as it emerged in our multiple conversations during and after the project as well as from her conduct in the running of the institute of Beit Ha’Ir – is motivated by resistance to what she perceives as the stereotype of the ‘boring’ history museum. Performance theorist Madison Moore politicises the trope of boredom in his discussion of fabulousness, the ‘queer eccentric’ self-fashioning of queers of colour. He cites performance artist Alok Vaid-Mneno, who suggests adding ‘boring’ to the list of oppressor identities: cis, white, boring, men’ (2018: 14). When thus aligned with transphobia, racism, and patriarchy, boredom appears as an actively violent oppression of the limitation of possibilities and divergences, alluding to the oppressive workings of the line that Ahmed theorises. In commissioning performers to interfere with these lines, the curator potentially invites the destabilisation of other lines by which Beit Ha’Ir is oriented (such as the White City and its racist ideology). In the case of Beit Ha’Ir, it is these curatorial and managerial policies that open up the potential of decolonising acts on and in the building. From the perceptive of the archive, it is an example to what happens when the (actual as well as Derridean) ‘gate keeper’ of the archive goes rogue. Commenting on Alok’s ‘politics of boredom’ Moore proposes that ‘the boredom-resistant flavour of fabulousness further highlights that this aesthetic genius is about a certain kind of agency and seizing of the here and now […] highlight[ing] a politics of abundance, expression, and expansion that marginalised people embrace’ (100).103 Similarly, in making the performance, we turned to the abundant expression of an epic musical performance that will engulf the building and deterritorialise it for a syncopated ‘here and now’.

103 I keep Moore’s use of first name when referring to his interviewees.
The Productive Enigma of Arlossoroff's Murder; An Excuse to Decolonise

In the context of the Hindu Karaga performance in Bangalore, Krishnamurthy notes that:

There is a tendency to think of narrative primarily as a temporal art, and landscape as something visual, spatial, an unchanging background and therefore non-narrative (Potteiger & Purinton, 1998). Ricoeur (1981) points out that narratives combine two dimensions, one a temporal sequence of events and the other non-chronological configurations that organises narratives into spatial patterns. The associations and themes that intertwine within the Karaga performance with the city form creates a powerful urban spectacle associated with historic patterns, people, and myths. Following what Bakhtin (1981: 84) expands as when ‘space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history (Krishnamurthy 2016: 138).

In *Who Killed* we dressed the building of Beit-Ha’Ir with the story of the murder mystery. While the main locations that feature in the story – such as the place of the murder, the hospital to which Arlossoroff was brought and his grave – are all in a short walking distance from the building (apart from the funeral assembly) there is no particular factual connection between the events of the murder to the concrete site of Beit Ha’Ir. Rather, it was our deliberate choice to take advantage of the sense of historicity that is performed by the conserved building, in its iconic façade or in the preserved office of Tel-Aviv’s first mayor Mayer Dissingoff for example, and project the events and characters of the story on them. Serving the physical and symbolic setting for the performance, the building’s alignment with institutional-settler narratives highlighted and foregrounded the explicit as well as implicit ‘obliques’ that make up the Arlossoroff archive.

In 1933 the diplomat Haim Vitaly Arlossoroff was the head of the state department in the Jewish Agency and a prodigy of the Zionist Labour Movement (Mapai) headed by David Ben-Gurion.104 Arlossoroff’s assassination at the age of 34 on the beach in Tel-Aviv during an evening stroll with his wife Sima was received with shock and dismay by the Zionist population of Palestine, marking an unprecedented fracture in a society that until then imagined itself as utopian, tolerant, and progressive. Although no one was convicted of the crime, the aftermath of the murder gave rise to seven different theories, each concerning a different political power and, concurrently, offers a different orientation to the event and the reality in which it took

104 All of the historical information is based on the research that was conducted by historian Ilan Sheizaf for the project ‘Who Killed Arlossoroff? The Musical!’ and commissioned by Beit Ha’Ir Museum. The research included mainly the Central Zionist Archives and the Israel State Archive in Jerusalem, and the Archive of The Zionist Labour Movement (The Lavon Centre) and the Archive of the Revisionist Movement (Metzudat Ze’ev) in Tel-Aviv. Its findings are presented here solely as an indication of the material that formed the archive of the performance and not as historical findings or peer-reviewed historiographic research.
place. Nonetheless, in popular public memory the Arlossoroff case crystallised as an attack of a right-wing Zionist faction on the predominant Labour party in which Arlossoroff was a rising star, second only to Ben-Gurion. The latter had played an essential role in the formation of this accepted narrative and the accusation served as a political weapon against the right-wing leader Menachen Begin many decades after the events.\textsuperscript{105} At the time, the right-wing Revisionists harshly denounced Arlossoroff for his attempts to negotiate a deal with the newly elected Nazi government to save German Jews and their property by moving them to Palestine in an organised collective way. This action was seen by the right as a weak and humiliating behaviour befitting an exilic Jew rather than a true Zionist settler (the ‘New Jew’). During the investigation conducted by two Jewish investigators in the British Mandate police, two Palestinian Muslims from Jaffa turned themselves in, claiming to have attempted to mug the Arlossoroffs on the beach and to have shot him by mistake. Despite withdrawing their confessions shortly after, and although they were acquitted by the court, to this day, this version is the one accepted and propagated by the Zionist right. Though lacking any historical or legal grounding, the blame of the murder on Arabs is casually stated in street-signs (such the one in Figure 24).

\textsuperscript{105} One of Begin’s first initiatives after being elected Prime Minister in 1977 was to launch an official commission of inquiry that revisited the Arlossoroff case. The only official conclusion of the committee published in the early 1980s was that the murderers could not have been the right-wing activists who were blamed for it.

Figure 35: A street sign in Arlossoroff Street in Be’er Sheva. Translation: ‘Dr Haim Arlosoroff Street. 1899-1933. An economist, statesman and intellectual. Leader of the Labour Movement. Was murdered by Arabs on the beach of Tel-Aviv’. Photographer unknown.
A third theory was published in a book in the early 1990s, placing the blame on the anti-Zionist Communist party of Palestine (PKP) who objected to Arlossoroff as a representative and operator of the Zionist settlement. The book suggests that the PKP was backed up by the KGB, itself instructed directly by Joseph Stalin who was keen to undermine British control in the Levant. This theory is of particular significance in the evaluation of the Arlossoroff’s story as material that interferes with straightening-devices. As the PKP was the only political fraction in Mandate Palestine to have included both Palestinians and Jews, the Communist theory evokes the potential of an Arab-Jewish resistance to Zionist settler-colonisation and testifies to its durability within the political traditions of Israel-Palestine. In the contemporary political climate of Israel-Palestine, such a predicament is largely perceived as either dangerously naïve, or as a treacherous, liberal stance that serves foreign interests. To many, it is simply inconceivable.

The latter theory is one out of three theories that draw links (or lines) between the local politics of Mandate Palestine to world politics and interests, thus interrupting settler-tendencies towards singularity and exceptionality (Lentin 2018). One of them points a finger towards the British authorities and, particularly, at Sir Patrick Rice, the head of the secret-police in Palestine who was relocated to South Africa shortly after the events. Historians who support the possibility that Arlossoroff was taken down by the British administration with whom he had close ties relate the motive for the murder to a private letter from Arlossoroff to Haim Weitzman, head of the Jewish Agency and Israel’s first President. In this alleged correspondence, Arlossoroff expresses his fear about the prospects of the British Government ever granting Zionists a national home in Palestine and contends that the only possible way forward is by means of violent resistance to British rule. The fierce and violent rupture that ensued between the Zionist right and left as a result of the assassination serves to support the thesis that this was an action in tandem with a ‘divide and rule’ policy of British imperialism, well known from other colonial contexts such as India and Kenya. Such equivalence that places Zionist history as yet another troublesome site of British imperialism and the Zionists as its duped subjects is again in conflict with self-proclaimed exceptionality of the Zionist case and therefore its moral legitimacy on the one hand, and with the image of the Sabra’s command over land and history and its cunning manipulation of both British and Arabs, on the other.106

106 Sabra; Hebrew for prickly pear, a symbol of the ideal Zionist settler (see Almog 2007).
A fifth theory is an extension of the latter, bringing into the frame David Ben-Gurion himself, who had much to gain from the elimination of the only competition he faced within the Labour party and, therefore, might have colluded with the British. The close involvement of different leading figures from Labour in the investigations of the murder and suspicions for distortion of justice serve to solidify this theory. The suggestion that the founding father of the State of Israel and the administration of its party gained their primacy through such foul means is a direct assault on the settler desire for pure and just provenance and the disavowal of founding violence (Veracini 2010: 77-8). Yet another extension of the British-Ben Gurion connection turns to Sima Arlossoroff, the deceased’s wife. Beyond the fact that she was found to have carried a gun on the night of the murder, her crucial testimony as the only witness was inconsistent throughout the investigation. This suspicion is heightened by her vehement a priori propagation of the accepted theory (right-wing extremists), and refusal to talk or collaborate with anyone who suggested otherwise. Mrs. Arlossoroff’s personal motive for murdering her husband is related to his alleged multiple affairs with other women and the photograph of his young secretary that was found in his wallet by the police.

Figure 36: A slide from the presentation for the cast and production crew of ‘Who Killed’, listing the seven theories. Translation: Title: ‘The War of Theories’. (left to right) 1. ‘The Right wing did it’; 2. ‘The Arabs did it’; 3. ‘The Communists did it’; 4. ‘The British did it’ (4); 5. ‘The Nazis did it’; 6. ‘His wife did it; 7. “The other theory” (Samuel Goldwyn).
A seventh and (so it seems) last theory proves particularly popular, as it served the basis of two novels of historical fiction. It relies on the close relationships Arlossoroff had during his youth in Berlin with Magda Goebbels, the wife of Hitler’s second in command, Joseph Goebbels. The different accounts of the Nazi theory oscillate between pointing out Joseph Goebbels’s paranoid obsession with his wife and a political need to clear her past from any non-Aryan taint on the one side, and to alluding to Magda Goebbels’s desire to avenge her former sweetheart who broke her heart on the other. Either way, personal connections between the Zionist leadership and the Nazi elite referenced here are more than uncomfortable in the face of a national narrative that mythologises the two as inhabiting the opposing sides of absolute good and absolute evil.

In its multivalence and ambivalence, as well as in its proposition of alternative and speculative histories, the Arlossoroff archive is a myriad of oblique lines, sticking out and messing up the neat line of settler perception of history and, therefore, identity and political present. That said, as good a story as it may be, the eighty-five year old murder mystery of Arlossoroff by no means represents a topical issue. It can emerge as radical only to the extent it is able to facilitate the coming into view of the conditions of arrival of political and ideological givens. In this it is similar to the trope of the kibbutz and kibbutz culture and landscape explored earlier. Arlossoroff is known to contemporary Israelis and Palestinians as the name of a street, a train station or numerous schools. The name is part of the dormant landscape of the city, relegated to the background, where its potentially subversive charges, connotations, and connections are out of sight. Freeman relates her conception of temporal drag to ‘the power of anachronism to unsituate viewers from the present tense they think they know, and to illuminate or even prophetically ignite possible futures in light of powerful historical moments’ (2010: 61). The dramaturgical techniques that we developed for *Who Killed* were aimed primarily at sustaining the multiplicity of potential histories, which by their very coexistence in space and time were able to suspend the ‘straightening’ of each other’s obliqueness.

**Dramaturgy of Heteroglossia**

In contrast to the performance of Tilda Death I analyse in Chapter 3, as a commissioned work *Who Killed* at first had little to do with ideas of the settler-archive or trajectories of decolonisation. As the making process took place during the course of my research, I can point
out the influence my reading of settler-colonial scholarship and the development of my ideas of settler-culture as an analytical framework had on the project from its onset. A pertinent example is how the very idea for the production began as a joke. After being invited to propose a project to Beit Ha’Ir, my co-director Yulia and I visited the building, and at a certain point she asked me if I knew of any crime stories from the history of Tel-Aviv that we might be able to adapt. My impulsive response was ‘look around you, this is the crime, Tel-Aviv, all of it. That’s the crime.’ Registering her amused bafflement, and realising I was not being very helpful, I added ‘but if you really insist, we can make a musical about the murder of Arlossoroff.’

I referenced Arlossoroff as a place-holder for an obsolete and irrelevant trope, as one would in Israeli vernacular, as an idiom for a story or a question no one is actually concerned with; a material located at the absolute background of perception. However, Yulia took my suggestion seriously, partly because she is a relatively recent an immigrant to Israel who is not familiar with any of these stories, or, in Ahmed’s terms, did not experience as many (or any) repetitions of actions that relegate this story to the background. As far as lines of perception in Zionist settler-culture go, Yulia assumes an oblique position, and while I was cynical, she was genuinely curious. For a long time, what drove the project was its promising title; it was funny, and our attempt to push the joke to its limits became a basis for the dramaturgy. Gender and queer studies scholar Jack Halberstam also take jokes seriously, when including them in his theorisation of ‘queer failure.’ For Halberstam, failure is ‘a refusal of mastery, a critique of the intuitive connections within capitalism between success and profit, and as a counterhegemonic discourse of losing’ (2011: 11). Defining his methodology of thinking about failure through multiple references from popular culture, he writes:

I seek to provoke, annoy, bother, irritate, and amuse; I am chasing small projects, micropolitics, hunches, whims, fancies. Like Jesse and Chester in Dude, Where’s My Car? I don’t really care whether I remember where the hell I parked; instead I merely hope, like the dudes, to conjure some potentially world-saving, wholly improbable fantasies of life on Uranus and elsewhere. At which point you may well ask, as Evey asks Gordon in V for Vendetta, “Is everything a joke to you?” To which the very queer and very subversive TV maestro responds, “Only the things that matter” (2011: 21).

Halberstam foregrounds jokes as an element of what culture studies scholar Stuart Hall named ‘low theory,’ looking ‘for a way out of the usual traps and impasses of binary formulations’
(2). It is a device of disorientation, one that is not aimed to find an answer but rather to lose the habit of the line, to unlearn it. In contrast, Halberstam observes, ‘the desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production’ (6). It is by following his theoretical work that I place importance and value on the incidental and ridiculous, the historically inaccurate and irresponsible, in both the making process and the outcome of *Who Killed* when theorising it as drag, within this context.

One expression of this joke-(dis)oriented dramaturgy is the structuring of the show through several layers, or several concentric circles, that together form the maze in which the spectator gets lost. None of these layers takes it upon itself to ‘tell the story’ of who killed Arlossoroff, nor attempts to solve the riddle. The question that is in the title of the project is framed as an opportunity to turn to multiple directions at once rather than inviting a linear monolithic answer (which is anyway impossible). As the different possible answers are also different configurations, speculations, potential alignments of history, the performance become an exercise in misalignment. Through the immersive technique, this exercise is corporealised, where the deliberate division of space and enhancement of the already illogical tendencies of the architecture of the building work to disorient the audience. Halberstam revisits culture theorist Walter Benjamin’s concept of the stroll and the Situationists’ *dérivé* when discussing the political significance of getting lost. She proposes to constitute our relationship with knowing through ‘an ambulatory journey through the unplanned, the unexpected, the improvised, and the surprising’ (16), where the goal is ‘to lose one’s way, and indeed to be prepared to lose more than one’s way’ (6). In a fashion that echoes the dual structure of the kibbutz settler-archive discussed in the previous chapters, Beit Ha’Ir is composed of an historically conserved section at the front of the building and a renovated modern gallery area at the back. A room that connects the two was transformed to depict the dining room in Arlossorof’s mother’s apartment, where he would have been at the time of the murder had he not changed his plans at the last minute in favour of a restaurant meal and a stroll on the beach. The Shabbat supper table that was attached to the ceiling of the room seems to capture both the framing of the oblique and the dramaturgy of disorientation experimented with in the show (figure 26).
The principle or concept that facilitated the multiplicity of information and imagery was the convention of a filming location. This was intended to offer the audience an idiosyncratic logic through which to navigate while remaining playful and exposed. It gave a straightforward justification for the existence of multiple locations and events taking place simultaneously as well as a platform to stage acts of large-scale audience participation such as the funeral scene. Cast as extras on the set, the audience was encouraged to move from one location to the other according to the arbitrary needs of the production. The very notion of an ‘extra’ on the set suggests a diagonal position. She is in the scene but not an actress nor prop, defined by what she is not rather than what she is. Extras are not only relegated to the background of the filmic frame but are constituting it by simply ‘being there,’ witnessing the production process with little or no responsibility to generate content. While being led throughout the show by the voice of the director of the film, the inversion of foreground and background generated through the metaphor of the filming location fixed the point of view of the show as well as the orientation in it through the oblique position of the extra.

Circling the archival material, the made-up story of the making of a film served to facilitate the reintroduction of the material into contemporary discourse, as well as reference a continuum
between an artistic work and the archival document. The details of the story were handed to
the audience both through the website of the performance and in the printed program
distributed before the show. Tamara Brenek (modelled after the grandmother of one of the cast
members) is the director that the audience can only hear but never see. She is a Berlin-based
experimental film director whose artistic approach relies on improvised scenes with large
numbers of non-actors and extras. Recently, she found in the attic of her deceased
grandmother’s house five old paintings that caught her attention. The expressionist paintings
vaguely depicted a funeral scene, a court scene and an investigation scene, all situated in the
shadows of a dark urban landscape. An examination in the (equally invented) Institute for
Forensic Art established a connection between the paintings and the murder of Arlossoroff.
Brenek embarks on extensive research into the Arlossoroff archive, as well as her
grandmother’s biography, and arrives at the conclusion that the paintings conceal unpublished
information that would solve once and for all the 85-year-old murder mystery. The epic musical
feature she is filming in Beit Ha’Ir is her way to decipher the secrets encrypted in the paintings.
Woven out of believable and quasi-believable elements, the ‘cover story’ of the performance
acted as a metaphor for our own engagement as makers with the Arlossoroff archive and thus
shared it directly with the audience. A painter as well as a theatre director, Yulia made the
paintings that featured as the paintings of Brenek’s grandmother and I recorded Brenek’s voice
that was played to the audience during performances as the director’s instructions. In this, we
both modelled directly and corporeally what we invited the audience to do when encountering
the archival material through the different scenes of the show and on the walls of the exhibition
that served as its set.
The paintings were positioned on the gallery’s walls, conflated with the abundance of visual and textual material from the archive. Featuring the world of the show as Brenek’s mood-boards and story boards, the audience was encouraged to explore them as a means to gain inspiration and immersion in the world of the show so to appear more authentic as extras on the set (Figure 27). While Yulia created the paintings based on the archival material, the exhibition reversed the hierarchical and temporal relations between the fictional and the factual, where the different documents were positioned as a means to interpret and contextualise the paintings. Another layer of the exhibition included sketches of the songs, set and costume designs, protocols and lists from production-meetings and other authentic documents from the archive of the production, featuring as relics from the creative process of Brenek’s production. The palimpsest that resulted on the walls of the gallery of Beit Ha’Ir worked to collapse the hierarchies and taxonomies of primary or secondary resources, important or insignificant, factual or fictional, reliable to flimsy.

![Image of the gallery](image_url)

**Figure 38:** Audience members looking at the walls of the gallery of Beit Ha’Ir in *Who Killed Arlossoroff? The Musical!* Design and curation: Yulia Ginis, Noam Bar and Raz Weiner. Photograph by Tom Porat.

Apart from being summoned to a central area for the large-scale musical scenes, the audience moved between spaces while serving the film production in one way or another, while different spaces functioned according to significantly different styles and rules, often deliberately contrasted. One example was the scene of the investigation room that took place across from
the hospital scene. The investigation room featured a set of short sketches in a dramatic style inspired from Film Noir and crime dramas, using the protocols of the police investigation from the archive as their starting point and gradually deteriorating into absurd nonsense. Different theories of the murder featured through the identity of those investigated and the convention of a film set allowed to repeat scenes multiple times, manipulate them and change them, as different takes. The hospital scene on the other hand explored one specific and largely unknown moment from the story, where during the last two hours of Arlossoroff’s life in the hospital he was visited by Tel-Aviv’s mayor Meir Dizengoff. According to this record, the latter interfered with the procedure and insisted on replacing the physician who treated Arlossoroff with another. Despite the arrival of the more experienced physician and the fact that the hospital was rather well equipped, Arlossoroff died shortly after. Using an abstract style of movement and characterisation, the scene elaborated and developed different speculations as for the nature and implications of Dizengoff’s visit.

Figure 39: Dani Brosovani as investigator Arazi and Ori Levanon as K, a communist suspect, and audience members in the Investigation Room scene. Photograph by Tom Porat.
The two distinctly different approaches conflated in the two adjacent spaces, where the noise and music from one could be heard in the other, maintained an overall emphasis on the multiplicity of options and narratives. In a decision that was made towards the end of the rehearsal period and after some experimentation with live audiences, the door that separated the two spaces opened before the last final musical number of the show, allowing actors and spectators to pour from one space to the other as the two scenes continued in their respective distinct aesthetic styles. This created a sharp effect of disorientation, even horror, first experienced by the performers in rehearsal and later by the audience who grew accustomed to the spatial and stylistic separation. The image of opening a door became both a symbol and an action of allowing the diagonal movement across a border-line (the wall) that was established in the syncopated time of the show, opening up new horizons of perception and imagination.

Attempting to describe the effect we have attempted to create through the performance of Who Killed in relation to the settler-archive, I turn to literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia, defined as ‘the combination of the subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous, unities [...] into the higher unity of the work as a whole’ (Bachtin et al. 2011: 226). In a linguistic context, literary theorist and Bakhtin translator Michael Hulquist expands heteroglossia to signify the tension between text and context:
Heteroglossia is] the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions – social, historical, meteorological, physiological – that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces particularly impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve. Heteroglossia is as close a conceptualisation as is possible to that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide; as such, it is that which a systematic linguistics must always suppress (2011: 428).

In what Hulquist describes as the work of the linguist who suppresses heteroglossia (in order to enable a homogenous, unified, and transferable lingual system) we can see the labour of creating a line. The line of language is created by straightening (repressing) the multiplicity of meaning in every utterance; that is – relegating heteroglossia to the background. The novel, according to Bakhtin, on the other hand is characterised by the enablement and foregrounding of heteroglossia, where ‘[a]uthorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, [and] the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships’ (2011: 263).

By ventriloquising the settler-archive of Arlossoroff through manipulation of space, speech, text, painting, song, documents, objects, and soundscapes – simultaneously, and without clear primacy of authority of one element of the one over the other, we adapted heteroglossia as a dramaturgical strategy. As does the novel in Bakhtinian theory, the story, or stories, that comprise this archive turned from two-dimensional lines into multi-dimensional spaces, open for the audience to experience and engage with. This approach made it more difficult to straighten-up those oblique elements that are revealed in the archive, which are routinely straightened by settler ideology, thus exposing the violent, problematic, and disconcerting conditions of arrival of buildings, street names, and political realities.

Parallel to the qualities of constructive confusion I have explored in reflecting on preforming Tilda Death, I offer the two as an initial articulation of dramaturgies of decolonisation of settler spaces and culture, capitalising on the analysis of the settler archive as inherently containing a decolonising potential. The phenomenological qualities of Tilda’s drag are experimented here in the context of a large-scale immersive performance and thus extended to architecture as the
site of resistance to the work of settler straightening devices. Crucially, what was presented in relation to both these shows is an analysis from a maker’s perspective. A much-needed complementary study of audience reception of these dramaturgical devices and their decolonising effect, is beyond the scope and method of this thesis. However, a review of the show described *Who Killed* as a ‘controversial brilliancy’ (Friedman 2008), indicating the difficulty to classify the work or clearly define its target audience. While this may well be a response to a difficulty to decode the work’s meanings altogether, it does simultaneously testify to its position outside of rehearsed lines (conventions) of perception.
Epilogue: DRAGGING UP A SETTLER STATE

The Decolonising Potential of the Tel-Aviv Contemporary Drag Scene

Drag can be used as a tool not only to entertain but also to speak out against injustice and ideas that we think are absolutely stupid and drag has the power... I think everyone that's ever put on heels or been in drag and entertained knows that drag has the power to bring those who are the furthest away from us closer to us, people who don't necessarily identify as a part of our community but they can see the message and they are entertained at the same time and that is the perfect combination.

(Peppermint, TLV-fest Drag Search Competition, 02/06/2018)

In conclusion, I would like to attend to the transitions in drag performance in Tel-Aviv in the last three years in order to consider drag as a potentially decolonising process. By contextualising this change within the cultural power-dynamic of a settler-society and historicising its process of becoming, I argue that the globalising influence of the reality television show RuPaul’s Drag Race contributes to a new reality of diversity and dialogue within local drag scenes. In order to develop this argument, I follow my friend, the drag performer – or drag-queer, as he would have it – Moran Rosenthal and his drag persona Ana Tachment. While scholarly engagement with the mainstreamisation of drag often privileges aesthetic and representational concerns, my analysis incorporates materialist as well as ideological perspectives to retrace the outlines of contemporary drag and its operations within contemporary Israeli settler-culture. I hold that contemporary drag practice in today’s Israel-Palestine occupies a unique position for creating cultural resistance to the Zionist settler-colonialism due to a combination of historic-political reasons aligned with drag’s phenomenological capacities as a device of disalignment and assembler of publics.

In June 2018, the drag performer Moran Rosenthal and I shared the stage of Strange Fruit. That is to say, Anna Tachment and Tilda Death – our respective drag personas – performed there together. Strange Fruit is a series of drag events produced by Clipa Theatre, one of Israel’s formidable and productive ensembles of performance and a popular fringe venue. The unusual initiative seemed to be a response to the recently growing mainstream popularisation of the trope of drag through American reality shows such as RuPaul’s Drag Race (Logo TV).
The successful venture fills the house to capacity at every event and develops new audiences for the theatre. Moran/Ana is one of the initiators and founders of the Fruit, though he is not part of the theatre’s ensemble. Despite having trained professionally as an actor, Moran did not make a professional living from acting before. Rather, Ana Tachment developed a drag persona through ongoing experimentation in queer clubs and parties, often marrying progressive anti-occupation politics of solidarity with queer performance. My conversations with Moran about Ana’s experiences on a theatre stage sparked my interest in what appears to me to be a unique position, artistically and politically.

**Locating Israeli drag scene on the map of Zionist settler colonialism**

An uninformed visitor to Tel-Aviv in the summer of 2018 could easily get the impression that drag is everywhere. An incremental growth of makers and audiences of drag performance in Israel marks a bona fide change in culture economies. This process is said by senior drag artists to have begun approximately three years ago (in conversation with the author, June 2018). At present, more than five permanent weekly or bi-monthly drag events make drag performance available to audiences on a near-daily basis at multiple venues, in Tel-Aviv alone. Unlike megacities such as London and New York, which have continually nurtured large and diverse queer communities with well recorded traditions of drag performance (as recorded in studies such as Newton 1979, Muñoz 1999, Senelick 2000, Greer 2012, Barrett 2017), until recently Tel-Aviv had only one weekly drag-night and occasional appearances of drag queens at gay parties. While the positioning of Tel-Aviv as a popular site for gay tourism can partially contextualise this trend (although the predominantly Hebrew-speaking shows are limited in their appeal for tourists), it does not account for the nascent establishment of drag venues and troupes in other cities such as Afula, Beersheba and Haifa. Additionally, it does little to explain the opening of and growing demand for drag-schools (two of which are presently operating in Tel-Aviv), drag make-up tutorials and the abundant reflections thereof in platforms of social media – all of which did not exist until very recently. I therefore propose that additional two socio-cultural factors are implicated in this phenomenon.

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107 Political theorist Jasbir Puar who coined the term homonationalism writes that ‘the neoliberal accommodationist economic structure engenders niche marketing of various ethnic and minoritized groups, normalizing the production of […] a gay and lesbian tourism industry built on the discursive distinction between gay-friendly and not-gay-friendly destinations’ (Puar 2013: 338). In the context of Israel-Palestine, the branding of Tel-Aviv as a gay haven participates in ‘pinkwashing’ the violence and disposition of colonialism.
An external factor, and the most conspicuous one, is the global legitimising influence of the cultural production of the US drag-queen RuPaul Charles on practitioners of drag and, as importantly, on the growth of new drag-publics around the world (Castellano and Machado 2017; Villanueva Jordán 2015; Brennan and Gudelunas 2017). As the body of scholarship that by now can be called ‘RuPaul-studies’ testifies, the popularity of the reality TV show RuPaul’s Drag Race (henceforth RPDR) has mainstreamed drag in an unprecedented way in global culture. The period of time during which the drag scene in Israel has boomed runs parallel to the time that the show had been accessible to Israelis through the streaming platforms of Netflix, and later Amazon Prime. Evidence of the growing currency of the show in the local drag scene is expressed in the recruitment of contestants of the RPDR to act as special judges in ‘Drag-Search,’ the annual drag competition organised by Tel-Aviv’s queer cinema festival, the TLV-Fest. While the interest in this new competition (established 2017) is a prime expression of the RPDR-inspired popularity of drag, the event acquires much of its prestige and appeal from the presence of the RPDR’s international drag celebrities.

At the same time, another relevant trend peculiar to the Israeli locale is the public atmosphere generated by Benjamin Netanyahu’s second government (elected in 2015), characterised by the coterminous increase in both nationalistic and religious sentiments, expressed in escalating animosity and violence towards minority groups. This process has been accompanied by the erosion of (relatively) progressive, pro-LGBTQ legislation and public discourse achieved during the previous three decades (Gross 2015). While LGBTQ people are far from being homogenous politically and, generally speaking, can be said to mirror general society’s distribution of political leanings, as a political sector they are associated with the left and, therefore, in opposition to Netanyahu’s political climate. Significantly, this is true mainly in terms of secularity and liberal lifestyle and less obvious when questions of occupation, militarisation and oppression of Palestinian citizens, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are concerned. Either way, we can relate the increase in feelings of deprivation and marginalisation in the Israeli left to the need to perform liberal culture as an act of self-affirmation, one that adheres to universal humanistic values rather than to nationalistic or religious ones. Both the politics and aesthetics of drag seem to suit this role, particularly when the opportunity to identify with an internationally celebrated label of queer acceptance and
tolerance such as RuPaul’s Drag Race is offering, thus confirming a full circle of cause and effect.

This latter point is crucial to the analysis of Israeli queer performance as embedded in, emanating from, reproduced by and, at times, protesting against the process of Zionist settler colonialism. The primacy of the capitalist-settler project and its objectives continuously redraft the borders and characteristics of both the settler and indigenous groups, vis-à-vis a third exogenous category (non-settler immigrants) in a gradual elimination of the indigenous and in favour of a ‘pure’ settler society. As expounded in previous chapters, Zionism followed earlier successful projects of settlement in envisaging itself as a progressive, enlightened and just endeavour, one that both identifying with its European origins and at the same time seeking to supersede them in moral stance and virtue; a better (utopian) version of Europe. To these ends, settler ideologies negotiate multiple apparatuses of disavowal, rationalisation and justification in the face of, and in tandem with the violence, disposition and, eventually, genocide of indigenous communities. When in the age of Trump, Brexit, Modi, Putin and Erdoğan progressive liberal-secular publics are undermined and marginalised worldwide, the Israeli centre-left struggles to negotiate a liberal identity within an escalating settler-reality. Supporting (allegedly) queer agendas such as legalisation of same-sex marriage or pride parades in Jerusalem allows for a kind of progressive activism that does not risk settler-status, a performance of good citizenship that does not involve nationalistic statements nor the denouncement thereof. ‘Gay rights’ in this context are constructed not as a part of a set of universal human rights but as an isolated case, acting as an ideological differentiator between an Israeli progressive public and the right-wing government.

The embrace of the LGBTQ agenda and, by extension, culture by mainstream progressive-identified people reached a tipping point in a wave of protests that followed the amendment of the Israeli surrogacy law in July 2018. The law that initially granted eligibility for state-supported surrogacy only to married heterosexual couples was expanded to include single women while excluding single men and gay couples (Sharon and Rosen 2018). Three characteristics of the popular support of the struggle illustrate the ambivalence, limitations and

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108 In relation to the dynamic creation of sectors and social groups in settler society Veracini notes that ‘a selective capacity to draw lines and/or to erase them depending on opportunity and local circumstances constitutes a crucial marker of settler substantive sovereignty’ (Veracini 2010:32).
conditions on the liberal acceptance of queers in Israel. Firstly, it is difficult to imagine that such popular support would be granted to any cause other than one focusing on homosexual cisgender males. Gays in Israeli popular discourse are nearly always synonymous with LGBTQ, implying the near invisibility of trans people, non-binary, lesbians and others in political debate and cultural representation (Harlap 2017). Along with the wider patriarchal-sexist bias towards men in modern societies, the legitimation of queer people in Israeli society is more often than not tied to military service and the right to equality is often justified through it. In other words, equality is implicitly conditioned by the partaking of colonial violence, in which cisgender men are already privileged. Secondly, the issue at the heart of the matter – reproduction and child rearing – ties intimately with settler demographic concerns, and the support thereof reinforces the message that inclusion of queers depends on heteronormative family structures. Interestingly, while the right of queer people to legally marry in Israel never gained much support, the right to bear children and even to be supported by the state while doing so was enthusiastically supported in public debate. Thirdly, an outstanding characteristic of the surrogacy law protest was the overwhelming endorsement of the struggle by major market giants such as IBM, Microsoft Israel and Cellcom and several large marketing and advertisement agencies (Bain-Lubuvitch and Shneider 2018). These, along many other major companies, released enthusiastic statements of support of the cause and advertised their consent for their LGBTQ workers to miss work in order to participate in protests. Economists as Peter Drucker and social theorists such as Guy Davidson describe the complex relationship of queer communities with capitalism, where ‘pink capitalism’ or ‘pink market’ is associated with the capitalistic targeting of homosexual cisgender white man as a privileged consumer power (Drucker 2015; Davidson 2016). In comparison, attempts to raise a public outcry or even awareness to the abuse and intimidation of Palestinian queer people by the security services for purposes of intelligence collection fail to produce any sympathy from either market agents or the general public. Serving here as indicators for well entrenched and long-lasting public sentiments, these factors outline the contour of the desired settler-queer: a heteronormative man who actively participates in colonial violence, contributes to the demographic superiority of settler society and models avid consumerism.

What I suggest here is a nuanced understanding of homonationalism, often discussed in terms of a rigid binary of queers versus state (see Puar 2007, 2013), as a means to place drag practice in Israel-Palestine politically. The Zionist settler colonial context demands further
differentiation between interest groups within the settler body politic, and their political agendas. It is easier to accuse a right-wing and predominantly religious government of pinkwashing than to associate it with a progressive, left-leaning middleclass, which expresses enthusiasm towards reproductive rights for gays. In revisiting her own concept, the political theorist Jasbir Puar notes that ‘like modernity, homonationalism can be resisted and resignified, but not opted out of: we are all conditioned by it and through it’ (2013: 3). I therefore hypothesise that the general popularity of drag as a ‘gay/queer culture’ in Israel is forced to negotiate these given conditions. As I have argued in this thesis, the radicality of drag cannot be discussed in a manner detached from its implication in wider networks of settler-colonialism, as much as patriarchy and ableism – queer as it may be. Indeed, queerness as a political quality and intervention must be revisited in order for decolonisation through queer performance and queer solidarity at large to be considered seriously.

From Opposite Margins - To Sharing Stage

It is against this reality of growing-though-conditional investment in LGBTQ publics and politics in Israel that I read the recent developments in queer performance. In what follows I reconstruct a brief nascent history of Tel-Aviv drag as related to me by Moran, from the early 2000s to the present day. Through narrating and contextualising its origins, I hope to elucidate the significance of the current drag-line Strange Fruit as being at a critical cross-roads of contemporary drag performance, and Moran and his work as embodying its tensions and dilemmas.

Although Moran has performed drag for nearly two decades now, when I ask him to share with me his understanding of drag, he begins by quoting RPDR-Season-Nine winner Sasha Valour, a drag artist known for his political speeches: ‘Sasha talks about taking our queer bodies and thrusting them into pop culture, to take the most popular and obvious thing and put a twist on it.’\(^{109}\) This configuration of the intervention of queer performance reflects a contiguous

\(^{109}\) My conversations with Moran and three other members of the Tel-Aviv drag community which inform this chapter were conducted over a period of two weeks in June 2018 in various places in Tel-Aviv. While some of the interviews were organised and recorded, other conversation occurred spontaneously in social or professional circumstances.
principle in Moran’s work as well as in the tradition of what he terms ‘radical drag’, in active opposition to ‘mainstream drag.’

Moran was one of the winners in the first Drag Search competition. His number exemplifies faithfully the way his drag politics resist heteronormative and homonationalist values. For his lip-synch of Eurythmics’ *Sweet Dreams* (1983), he wears a tight blue outfit that covers his head, alluding to a mannequin or a cyborg but also to a Muslim headscarf. The overall appearance does not attempt to convey a specific gender category (Figure 41). In his hand, he holds a large smartphone, and the audience is quick to decode the connection to the words of the song, establishing the smartphone as the mean through which ‘sweet dreams’ are made. The following lines – ‘everybody’s looking for something’ and ‘some of them want to use you’ – immediately tie to the domain of dating apps, criticising them as a symbol of alienating and objectifying gay culture. On the screen behind him appear multiple smartphone screens which first feature different dating apps, and later weapons, until eventually, the rectangular shapes morph into a block of the separation barrier that surrounds the West Bank. Towards the end of the number, they turn pink and then morph into smashed smartphone screens. The stream of allusions that accompany the familiar upbeat rhythm of the Eurythmics’ song becomes a condensed articulation of the relations between gay culture, consumerism (pink economy) and colonial violence. Their connections, regularly disavowed in mainstream culture, are dragged to the foreground. The image of the separation barrier on the stage of a mainstream drag competition in itself is a gesture of decolonisation, resisting disavowal. The very possibility of this performance to take place on such a central stage of performance is part of the new reality of Tel-Aviv drag.

Moran describes himself and his own practice in the following way:

I create performance and political drag that undermines gender dichotomy, dealing with connecting struggles and with the cybertechnological reality in which we exist. My stage name, Ana Tachment, resists definitions as well as making-present the Israel-Palestinian colonial reality that I am: ‘a separation of attachments’ (English); Ana (Please; Hebrew); Ana (I, me; Arabic) Tachment is spelled טאטנשטערטנה in Yiddish spelling, makes presence the Jewish-German-Polish language that was left behind, but in the midst of which I grew up.
The sensibilities of queer phenomenology which I have theorised throughout this thesis, the subversive capacity of making present that which is disavowed by interrogating conditions of arrival, is applied and experimented with throughout Moran’s work.

The radical drag that Moran articulates can be traced to a particular founding moment that took place in 2001, when the ‘Queerhanna’, a collective of performers and activists, began holding parties with a political agenda. Strongly inspired by topical utopian projects of the time such as T.A.Z, the World Social Forum and the anti-globalisation Global Movement, Queerhanna events highlighted ‘the break from the permitted and legal spaces’ and of ‘joyfulness […] as a form of resistance’, alongside ‘solidarity action to support communities affected by racism and discrimination’ (Kuttner 2017:5).110 Moran’s first public performances that took place in these events were curated alongside lectures, screenings of activist documentaries as well as DJ sets and dancing. Queerhanna performances included a lesbian Palestinian rapper comparing racism and gender oppression, a Palestinian drag artist depicting Palestine as a captive bride, and a Jewish Mizrahi performer depicting a pregnant Palestinian woman giving birth to a time-bomb and two elderly Jewish women singing to their deceased, Holocaust survivor father “be happy now, do you know how?” (Rosenthal 2017). The inclusivity of this scene encouraged people with a wide range of experiences, professionally-trained performers alongside amateurs, where value judgment focused mainly on content and its political relevance and adequacy rather than skill. Though clearly not all of these performances relied on gender-cross dressing nor attempted to signify queerness, Moran refers to them as ‘drag’ or ‘performances.’ Responding to my frequent requests to classify which of them qualified as drag for him, he refused to single out a specific parameter beyond ‘inclusivity, empowerment and anything that plays with gender.’ Moran told me he recognises a solid lineage that connects the Queerhanna to the present day through multiple events, venues and collectives.111 Throughout the nearly two decades of drag performances, queer critique, and deconstruction of gender, this precarious and barely marked performance tradition is aligned with multiple strands of anti-establishment narratives such as radical feminism, punk, anarchism, anti-consumerism, veganism and, significantly, antizionism. Within Zionist political phenomenology, it occupies the oblique and struggles for its visibility.

110 T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone by Hakim Bey (1991) was an influential text in activist and anarchist circles in the US and was translated into Hebrew in 2002. The text developed the idea of creating temporary utopian spaces as a mode of resistance to state oppression.

111 Examples for such venues and lines are: Cinema Paradildo, BrahamiMizrakhi, Pop-It, Queerefesh, and Roogatka.
Moran describes his drag as an alternative to ‘mainstream drag,’ the kind that is practiced in gay bars and parties. Israeli culture has seen the introduction of drag to the mainstream during the 1990s, particularly with the all-male drag ensemble Bnot-Pesya (Pesya’s Daughters), that started as a Purim performance by students from the Theatre Department of Tel-Aviv University. In its prime, Bnot-Pesya occupied the popular Friday-night political satire comedy slot (a local SNL equivalent). Within the gay scene and similar in style, the troupe of Gewald (‘Oh My God’ in Yiddish) that initially performed in one of Jerusalem’s only gay bars gained relative mainstream acclaim with their show Peot-Kdosoht (Holly Wigs). Members of the latter group formed the core of Tel-Aviv’s regular drag night in the Evita bar. For twelve years, until its closure in 2016, the Evita was one of the only permanent gay venues in Tel-Aviv and the unofficial home of mainstream drag performance in the city. Performances on Evita’s narrow bar-stage usually followed the aesthetic traditions of US drag-queen entertainment and included glamorous gowns and makeup, lip-synching and the impersonation of both English and Hebrew popular diva-songs, with light gay humour that was often misogynistic.

These two traditions, the one resembled by the Queerhanna and the other by the Evita, can be broadly generalised as either complying with a homonationalist settler-embrace of gays/queers and its values (‘mainstream drag’) or rejecting them all together (‘radical drag’). I stress ‘broadly’ here for two reasons. Firstly, while the specific venues or occasions of performance may have maintained a specific political line, individual performers could and did perform a wide range of styles and contents in both of them, often complicating and undermining this dichotomy. Secondly, two important traditions are invisibilised by such simplified binary observation that might suggest that these were and are the only two traditions of drag in Tel-Aviv. The lesbian Minerva club hosted a line of drag kings for several years during the 2000s, and after the venue closed its leading performers joined the events and venues of the radical drag. At the same time Palestinian drag, in Arabic, took place in parties organised by Al-Kaus, a leading Palestinian LGBTQ organisation, and they continue to this day. As both drag-king tradition and Palestinian drag are worthy of documentation, contextualisation and theorisation in their own right, the scope of this research does not allow for an adequate treatment of them. I write this concluding text while acknowledging its limitations, as in their absence, any analysis of settler-colonial relations to queer performance in Israel-Palestine is necessarily incomplete.
My own practice of drag developed somewhere between these traditions, represented by the Queerhanna on the one hand and by the Evita on the other. For my Bar-Mitzva I received a CD of Bnot-Pesya which soon became a key element in the sound-track of my youth and a millstone in the development of my sexual identity as well as artistic practice. Being involved in Jewish-Palestinian activism during the early 2000s, I attended Queerhanna parties and performed several times in one of its successor venues. When at drama school, I used to frequent the Evita drag nights and followed the drag career of its queens admiringly. However, the divide between these two parallel traditions meant that I never perceived them as having the same artistic or ideological continuum, and certainly not as belonging to the same performance genre or practice. When eventually I created my own drag, it was as a character in a theatre play, not as a queer performance in a politically affiliated venue nor as a drag queen in a gay bar. The changes in the practice of drag, including Moran’s, and my own personal and artistic growth, concomitantly, allowed me to recognise my practice as drag.

For Moran, the event that marks the transition in this long-standing oppositional dynamic is the closing of the Evita three years ago. The change in gay culture brought about the increasing use of dating apps, diminishing the appeal of gay public spaces. The advent of mega-clubs as the main gathering place of gay communities also decreased the demand for the function of the gay bar, but not for drag performance. The more or less coterminous closing of the Rugatka in 2014 – a radical-left vegan bar, which until then continued to nurture new performers into the tradition established by the Queerhanna – resulted in a new need for performance venues for drag.112 ‘It all created a void that needed to be filled,’ Moran concludes. With the influence of RPDR more people wanted to see drag while a new generation of drag artists were desperately looking for places in which to perform.

The style of this new generation of performers did not adhere to either of the two traditions I have outlined thus far, although it shares characteristics with both. What I will term henceforth ‘new drag’ aligns itself with ideologies and aesthetics of post-gender, often focusing on representations that collapse traditional gender binaries (bearded or hairy drag and drag-kings in dresses) and counters capitalist beauty norms (celebrating fat, trans or disabled bodies).

112 Almost all of the Queerhanna members have emigrated to Berlin, responding to the dwindling of communities of radical anti-establishment activism (Pishon 2018). Radical drag continued to take place in sporadic parties and venues such as the Zimer, the Mehoga, and the Tahat.
While the overt queer politics of new drag affiliates it with much of the performance of Moran’s radical drag, the strategic refrain from critique of Israel’s settler-colonial reality or any alignment with other groups of political struggle mirrors the tradition of mainstream drag. Furthermore, this practice introduced to the jargon of the local drag scene an additional axis to the one of radical mainstream, outlined by Moran: that of old-school versus new-school. Conversations with several Tel-Aviv drag artists indicated that this binary is often thought of in terms of politically-dated versus politically-adequate, respectively.

For a short period, performers of the new drag collaborated with Moran and other practitioners of radical drag, creating unusually eclectic line-ups named D.U.Y.A (Drag Up Your Arse). At one point, this line assembled on one stage a monologue of a large-bodied lady at a shop till, a Palestinian bride detained at a checkpoint and a glamorous lip-synching Madonna. Interestingly, when Galina Por De Bras – a famous queen associated with the legacy of Peot-Kdoshot and the Evita – performed with them, she provided glamorous lip-synching to Josie Cotton’s ‘Johnny Are You Queer?’ (1982). While the inclusive variety of styles and political and aesthetic edge echo those of the early 2000s Queerhanna parties described above, the virtuosic skill and popularity with wide audiences seem to evoke the days of the Evita. The new reality of drag produced a creative cross-pollination of styles and political agendas, and their popularity forced the organisers to move to ever larger venues.

The D.U.Y.A lasted only a year and when its performers parted ways, four different drag-platforms crystallised, each representing a somewhat distinct style of performance and a political agenda to match, whether explicitly or not. The Pop-It continues the line of radical drag, emphasising the alliance of queer performance with resistance to compliance with settler colonialism and solidarity of struggles. Its April 2019 event, which I have attended, culminated with all of the performers standing on stage, holding signs with the names of the Palestinian protesters who were killed that week by the Israeli Defence Force during demonstrations against the siege on Gaza and for the Palestinian right of return. The Cross is the line of ‘new drag’ performers who recently moved their events to one of Tel-Aviv’s biggest performance venues to cater to their constantly growing audiences, characterised by queer-identifying people in their early twenties and their allies. Dedicated to queer politics and unlike the Pop It, they do not intend to create performances that assume a political stand on settler-colonial reality. However, The Cross’s August 2018 event included a Palestinian performer, who
featured a lip-sync act of the famous song ‘Aah w Noss’ by the Arab diva Nancy Ajram. This was framed as an explicit response to a new legislation that retracted Arabic from being an official language in Israel. The Werk is the drag-line organised by the drag queen Galina Por De Bras where many of the Evita drag-queens perform weekly. Its regular audience members are commonly older than the Cross-goers, and less numerous. Lastly, the Strange-Fruit is a drag night that was founded by Moran and two other performers together with two drag artists, members of Clipa Theatre. Moran emphasises the strong sense of relatedness and collaboration that exists between all four, and the performers of each platform occasionally perform in the others. At the same time, debates, disagreements and quarrels produce a constructive ongoing dialogue about the definition of drag, and its place and meanings within a reality of settler-colonialism, racism, and violence.

Within contemporary Tel-Aviv drag practice, the advent of the neoliberal label RuPaul’s Drag Race, with its strong consumeristic-capitalistic agenda, enabled a new vital frame of reference. Influenced by the alluring association of drag with financial income and recognition beyond their marginalised queer communities, performers began perceiving themselves as owning a valuable skill, one that has professional value and demand. Practitioners in traditions that hitherto did not recognise themselves as belonging to the same practice are suddenly constituted, and constituting each other, as colleagues. However, so far this does not result in an imitation or acceptance of RPDG style and conduct of drag or of a single version of it. The present blossoming of Tel-Aviv drag involves not only an increase in the volume of performance-activity but also in diversity and pluralisation. While well-established traditions of social critique and critical theory associate market influence on cultural practice with homogenisation, here the possibility of an all-encompassing external category of drag has contributed to the exact opposite.

Contrary to the orientation of Marxist scholarly tradition, and particularly to the spirit of philosophers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s ‘Culture Industry’ (Adorno & Horkheimer [1944] 2002:94-136), by which capitalist consumerism is often associated with political pacification and compliance with hegemonic ideologies (mass deception), the dialogue that develops between distinctly different practitioners, and their answerability to each other, now encourages political interrogation and reflection. New acts of alignment of queer performance with anticolonial statements, as happened in the Pop it and the Cross, concomitant
with the growing popularity of and public interest in local drag, places this field in a special position vis-à-vis cultural decolonisation and settler-ontocide. Within the contemporary local drag practice, the advent of the neoliberal label of RPDG, with its strong consumeristic-capitalistic agenda, marked a new vital frame of reafferece; a new category, a new orientation.

Figure 4: Ana Tachment (Moran Rosental) in the TLV Fest drag contest 2017 (frame taken from a YouTube video)
CONCLUSION

This thesis was guided by several parallel trajectories of study, reflection, and theorising, which worked together to articulate a new approach for the study of culture and, within it, performance, within the specifics of the settler-colonial site of Israel-Palestine, from the point of view of the settler subject. Settler-colonial reality is characterised by the endurance of ever-adjusting structures of control, separation, elimination, and dispossession; resilient by their continual readjustment. Impervious to changes of regime or ideology, settler-projects thrive on the pragmatic disavowal of their colonial traits and the transformation of cultural activities into legitimating support. Paradoxically, performance interventions that attempt to resist, expose, and decolonise these structures are routinely absorbed into settler-culture rather than challenge it. Mostly that is the case when performance articulates itself within the discourse of nationalism and its adjacent domain of heteronormativity. While the relevance of queer theory to indigenous subjects and communities in settler-colonial reality was and is studied expansively, scholarship has given scant attention to its potential for re-thinking the decolonisation of settlers. To fill this gap, I have revisited drag – both as a practice of queer performance and as a phenomenological construct – as a mode of resisting alignment, a disorientation device, and destabiliser of singular significations. Within this process, my own practice of drag performance and theoretical grappling with its workings and meanings served as a prime source of inspiration and a mode of sense-making.

The subjects I explored initially emerged, were formulated, and then accumulated through an ongoing practice of performance-making, activism, and education in Israel-Palestine. My phenomenological mode of inquiry of settler culture implied positioning myself as its prime object of study, while acknowledging not only my positionality within social and political spaces shaped by Zionism but also the extrapolation of that self in time (family and national history) and space (both in terms of social groups and that of landscape). Considering the colonial work of isolating, fragmenting, and reframing oppressive realities – the examples for which were discussed, theorised, and demonstrated through multiple locales in this work – the phenomenological reconstruction of continuities and contingencies of myself as a settler, subject to the long-term process of elimination and disavowal was presented and tested as a method of decolonisation. The different thesis chapters have traversed a wide array of sites, scholarly disciplines, frameworks of analysis and ontological tools. Inspired and informed by
feminist and queer theorists, this scavenger methodology models an epistemological framework that enables the phenomenological un-making of settler lines of perception which, as I argue, is a precondition for the decolonisation of a settler society.

Suspicious of the absence of the once-pivotally formative kibbutz project - both as a symbol and as materiality - from the current political and scholarly debate of Israel-Palestine, I have explored its role in laying the foundations for the Zionist settler projects, at the turn of the twentieth century. The negotiation of socialism and colonialism as they emerge in the scholarly disciplines of ‘kibbutz studies’ reflect the broader mechanisms of rationalisation by which settler societies un-see the colonial violence they generate. The exposure of phenomenological gaps and blind spots in these traditions is a necessary step towards the theorisation of contemporary Israeli culture as a settler culture. In Ahmed’s phenomenological terminology, when studied independently from the Israeli national context, the kibbutz as a site and discourse affords access to the labour of the repetitions of the lines which orientate Israeli settler spaces and practices.

One such practice is that of racial or ethnic mimicry. When revising Sieg’s concept of ethnic drag, I find that racial mimicry has particular meanings and implications within settler spaces which are routinely overlooked in the research of performances of ethnic drag, and especially that of the US Minstrel Show. When reconfigured phenomenologically, that is, as implicated in Zionist settler-colonial economies and the tensions of elimination and ‘presencing’, ethnic drag - whether that of Shefita and Fauda’s Arabface or of the performances of blackface in Africa Days – is to be understood as a complex site that exposes settler-colonial relations more than it contributes to their naturalisation. Studied here for the first time in scholarly research, the tropes of Africa Day and their performance pedagogy of the ‘Nations of Nature’ in kibbutzim suggest the role of ethnic drag in the confrontation of early Zionist settlers with internalised legacies of antisemitism but also as an imagining of indigeneity. The drag here is twofold, both that of the white anthropological position as well as its necessary racialised and objectified other, both destabilised as naturalised normative categories to some extent. When considered as its disavowed (phenomenological) background, the contemporary popular arabface of Shefita and Fauda (their acute dissimilarities notwithstanding) can be seen as an indication of the advancement of the settlement process. In contemporary Zionism, lines of Jewish settler subjectivities are strong, ‘white,’ and invisible enough to be able to consume
‘Arabness’ as an attractive cultural commodity. This study reconstructs the settler-colonial contingency between these seemingly disparate practices of Zionist ethnic drag. It foregrounds them as phenomenological practices by their means of representation and disalignment, inevitably contradicting settler-colonial logic of the naturalisation of the settler subject and the disavowal of the indigenous and can be a target for and a site of decolonising interventions.

Another site of instability and contradiction with settler-colonial logic is the kibbutz archive, which I developed as the model of a settler-archive, a distinction I find necessary to the conceptualisation of methods for the study of culture as ‘settler culture.’ The under-researched tendency of archives of settler societies to record the indigenous – whether directly as part of the settlement project or through its negative spaces – undercuts the well-theorised mechanism of settler self-obfuscation and thus presents a vital potential for decolonisation. I contend that due to the oblique position that contemporary kibbutzim assumes vis-à-vis the Israeli national mainstream, that their archives are underregulated and therefore misaligned with contemporary trends of Zionist settler colonialism. The three different cases of acts of theatricalisation of archival material from kibbutz archives (after Davis) - that is, its repositioning so as to draw attention to the act of it being viewed – each operates differently on this decolonising potential of the kibbutz archive. In two examples of decolonising interventions in kibbutz archives, surrogate-metaphorical objects (BarOr) or texts (Gardi) were used as a method to mark negative spaces in which histories and memories of indigenous groups are archived. By theorising these interventions alongside the project of the Living Archive as performing landscape drag, the phenomenological process of drag becomes relevant to the study of gestures of interference and problematisation of perception of bodies other than human. Settler societies’ preoccupation with controlling and facilitating the perception of landscape is a prime site for such extrapolation, which in turn proves useful in highlighting settler lines of culture and subjecthood as malleable (by exposing their conditions of arrival) and, therefore, potentially susceptible to decolonisation and change.

In the chapters that conclude each of the two parts of the thesis, I advanced my theory of settler culture and the conditions for its decolonisation by translating them into dramaturgies in performance. Rather than artificially designing a performance that will test these, I have reflected on two works I created during the course of the study but independent from it. I have considered them against the tropes that emerged from my research of the peculiarities of ethnic
drag, in the case of Tilda Death in the Veterans’ Club, and of the archive, in ‘Who Killed Arlossoroff?’ In turn, I allowed the creative process and the performing of the shows to be influenced by ideas and questions that stemmed from my doctoral project. As I refrained from defining a strict hierarchy or causality between performance-making and theorisation, the two shows became a testing ground and a mode of contemplation simultaneously. Two main themes which emerged from this process that I have termed ‘performing as research’ are productive confusion and dramaturgy of heteroglossia. Both are articulations of the ability of moments within a show to disorientate audiences so as to facilitate encounters of what, after Ahmed, I called the oblique or the queer. It is with this optimism regarding the relation of the queer (thus configured) to the decolonising in and of settler culture, that I approach my concluding reconstruction of the recent history of the drag scene and, within it, the profession of drag, in Tel-Aviv. It is there - away from academic labour and discourse but perhaps in need of it - that I detect spontaneous trajectories for the decolonisation of Zionist settler culture and the creative revision of settler subjectivities.

The underlying research assumption regarding the decolonising effect of the ability ‘to see’ beyond, or to stray from settler phenomenological lines that orientate perception is not unlimited. The question that must follow the drag effect of suspending the work of straightening devices is what should and can happen next in the work of decolonising settlers, in realigning settler publics with indigenous struggles, with durable resistance to and dismantling of settler-colonial mechanism; to stop or even reverse the process. In its contribution to the paradigm of settler colonialism, this thesis foregrounds how performance may at least begin to contemplate, propagate, and imagine these transitions through culture. In this, the study of the obliques in the case studies of this work (or, rather, contextualising these case studies as oblique) suggests that the what I have discussed as radical - that which pertains to the roots of the ‘now’ (that is at the background) - may stand a better chances in resisting being straightened-up and incorporated into settler discourse than actions of provocation (which rely on the immediate intelligibility in discourse rather than foregrounding its conditions of arrival).

In the last decade, the relevance and potency of post-colonial theory and the study areas it gave rise to within theatre and performance (such as postcolonial and indigenous theatre), seem to have waned. Settler-colonial studies of performance and their phenomenological methods may
reinvigorate the investigation of the Political in performance, and the conditions by which performance may align itself with progressive politics and struggles for justice and freedom.
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