Stories on the Fault Lines: Storytelling, Community, and Memory among Israeli and Palestinian Youth

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Abstract

Storytelling holds a significant place in peace education and dialogue work with young people in Israel/Palestine, reflecting the popularity of the dual narrative approach as a framework for understanding the conflict. The approach is predicated on the assumption that there are two competing national narratives that have collided in the same geographical space, with young people only able to come to terms with the ‘other’ narrative through a process of concession and compromise, mediated by adults. Recognising the constraints and limitations of the dual narrative approach, my thesis focuses on the lives of Israeli and Palestinian youth who inhabit a border of some kind (physical, linguistic, ethnic, or intergenerational) and analyzes how stories are transmitted across and influenced by such boundaries. Special attention is given to traumatic histories that carry a social taboo, such as the Nakba in Israeli society and the Holocaust in Palestine, and how young people may develop and express their conceptions of community, belonging, and exclusion through storytelling.

The research is grounded in ethnographic fieldwork and practical storytelling workshops conducted over sixteen months in Israel/Palestine (March 2014 to July 2015), with various methods of narrative inquiry forming the basis for data analysis, notably Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The thesis is divided into four chapters, which are based on the dominant themes that emerged through fieldwork. ‘Language and the Hidden Landscape’ is an applied linguistic analysis of how young people living in segregated communities imagine and narrate places that are off-limits to them. ‘Violence in the Narration of Self and Other’, an examination of the violence inherent in face-to-face storytelling that is grounded in the phenomenological theory, discusses how the storytellers deal with violence through narrative, their depiction of members of the ‘other’ community’, and the more disturbing and potentially violent functions of storytelling in peace education for youth. ‘Forbidden Histories in Contested Spaces’ unpicks the shadowy interweave between Holocaust and Nakba memory, while ‘Happily Ever After?’ examines how the narrators view and construct endings – both for the conflict, and in their narratives. These themes bring together time, place, and inhabitants’ interaction with place and memory, resulting in a more complex and nuanced understanding of how young people growing up with intractable conflict use storytelling to interpret their histories and make sense of their lives in the present day, as well as the ways in which stories may interact even in a highly polarized and segregated society. In conclusion, the role of storytelling with children in conflict zones is re-evaluated, with the research suggesting that there needs to be a shift in emphasis from storytelling as a means of therapy to storytelling as a social and political act, a means of enabling young people to take a more active role in community-building, rehabilitation, and ultimately reconciliation.
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Dedication and Acknowledgements

During my fieldwork over 500 children were killed in Palestine/Israel, most of them in the Gaza Strip. My writing is dedicated to Emad and Qasem Elwan, who were among them.

I would like to thank Bertrand Taithe, Alison Jeffers, Peter Gatrell, and Jenny Carson for supervising and advising on this research; the Council for British Research in the Levant for financially supporting my fieldwork through a visiting fellowship; the many people who assisted with participant recruitment; the generous friends, in Palestine/Israel and further afield, who turned my work into a truly collaborative effort whether through providing critical insights, helping with my language skills, or simply supplying tea; and my long-suffering parents, who may finally dare to ask, “So how is the thesis coming?”

My special gratitude belongs to all the young people who took part with such curiosity and enthusiasm.
Chapter 1 – Once Upon an Intifada: Beginning the Story

How this project began

This research was inspired by my work at Sumud Story House, a creative arts and cultural centre located on Rachel’s Tomb Street in northern Bethlehem. The centre was opened by a Palestinian family in response to the violence the neighbourhood experienced during the Second Intifada (2000 – 2005), including the construction of the separation barrier and the nearby Checkpoint 300. The goal of Sumud Story House was to staunch the flow of families leaving the neighbourhood and to cultivate sumud [steadfastness] by bringing them together around cultural activities such as music and storytelling. Its director, Rania Jacaman, told me that she knew it had achieved its aim when she heard neighbourhood women starting to refer to it as baytna [our house]. I volunteered for a year in 2011 as a creative writing facilitator and I have retained close ties with the centre and its women ever since.

In one activity I helped to conduct, stories told by the women were mounted on the separation barrier itself, as a way of both reclaiming physical space and declaring the women’s right to speak. Melvina, a woman in her eighties who lived opposite Sumud Story House, described why she had initially been wary of Rania’s invitation to participate. A young relative had had his Jerusalem access permit revoked by the army authorities because he had been seen walking down a street in which a protest was taking place. All demonstrations, defined as unauthorized gatherings of ten or more Palestinians, were and remain banned in the West Bank under Israeli military law; Melvina was afraid that coming to Sumud Story House could be similarly classified as illegal political activity. “But Rania kept persuading me to come, and after a while I thought to myself, ‘I will go and see what they do there.’” Melvina’s story of her experiences in the neighbourhood now hangs on the wall, a few steps from the watchtower, in an area that Sumud Story House sometimes uses for open-air performances. (Figure 1) The teenagers who come to the house have graffiti-ed a postal label reading ‘Fragile’ and other reminders of impermanence onto the grey concrete slabs. As I collected stories for inclusion in what Rania was calling ‘the wall museum’ (Figures 2 and 3), I was to discover how fragile such barriers can be.

An English literature teacher in a private girls’ high school, Suzanne Atallah, recalled a diary-writing activity she had introduced during the Second Intifada’s army curfews, when school attendance was uncertain and often unsafe. The diaries were something that could be done at home. In addition to encouraging her pupils to keep journals, Suzanne used breaks in
Figure 1: ‘Fragile.’ Graffiti art by teenagers from Sumud Story House.
Figure 2: Melvina’s story.

Figure 3: The wall museum.
curfew to give them wartime diaries written by other youth, including Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl*. At first the girls were reluctant to touch it, as the Holocaust carries a strong political taboo in Palestinian society, but their eventual engagement with the diary was to spark an intimate community-wide conversation over the Holocaust: some parents contacted Suzanne to request their own copies. A colleague at Sumud Story House, a Dutch man married to a Palestinian woman, described how as the only person with freedom of movement he was dispatched to Jerusalem with instructions to buy all the English copies of Anne Frank’s diary that he could find.

As survey data from Israel/Palestine suggests that denial or negation of the history and collective memory of the other is intensified during times of increased violence and repression (Roberts 2013:158), I was intrigued that this project had been able to flourish at the height of the Intifada. Talking with former participants and browsing through their diaries, I became fascinated by the role that creative arts (particularly oral storytelling) might play in enabling people living with intractable political violence to access forbidden histories, and to interpret these within the context of their own lives and the contested spaces they inhabit. I began my research with a focus on the Holocaust in Palestinian society and the Nakba among Israelis, but soon my interests expanded. While the Nakba and the Holocaust have been formative to Palestinian and Israeli experience, I was curious about what stories might emerge if I did not use any one event as a compass. Instead I ask how storytelling itself – encompassing past and present, history and geography – shapes people’s conceptions of community, exclusion, and belonging.

As the project was inspired by the transmission of Holocaust memory across the separation barrier, and is concerned with contested space, I identified field sites by looking for other boundaries: not only physical borders, such as a segregated street in Old Hebron; but also the more figurative line between languages in a bilingual Hebrew-Arabic school. The selection of these sites gradually led me to recognize storytelling itself as a border-space, an idea discussed by Jessica Senehi in relation to genre and artificially imposed distinctions between fact and fiction: “Stories may be fictional tales or they may relate personal experiences or group history, but all stories and other narratives are never pure fact or fiction. Even a fairy tale may be used to express something that the teller sees as true.” (Senehi 2008:4) This liminal characteristic has led the anthropologist Michael Jackson to describe stories as “sites of defilement” (Jackson 2002:25), an idea that takes on fresh force when applied to contested spaces that are overshadowed by ethnically charged political violence, in which separation and polarization are the norm. As a result, storytelling by its very nature has
something particular to contribute to our understanding of how memory and community are created in these spaces.

Initially I planned to start my research with the women of Sumud Story House, whom I knew well, but quickly I realized that working with young people might be more fruitful. Firstly, it would allow me to examine the transmission of stories across another border, in the form of intergenerational boundaries. Secondly, facilitating creative arts sessions with young people at Sumud Story House had left me frustrated by the emphasis on therapy and education that distinguishes so much of the research on storytelling with conflict-affected youth. I was keen to refocus on the socio-political aspects of their storytelling and their role in imagining and narrating the communities in which they constitute such a significant demographic: 33.09% of Palestinians in the West Bank and 27.95% of Jewish Israelis are under the age of fifteen, while in Gaza the figure is 42.75%. Passing Israeli soldiers at checkpoints, who are usually aged between eighteen and twenty-one, and hearing Israeli friends talk about the preparatory activities they experienced in high school made me realize that while the architects of occupation might be middle-aged and older men, its day-to-day bricklayers are young. Grassroots protests and other popular resistance are dominated by Palestinian youth, with present-day activism overshadowed by the memory of the “children of the stones”, young protestors who became emblematic of the First Intifada. (Collins 2004:35-36) This increased my interest in young people’s narrative engagement with history and memory in Israel/Palestine, and my sense that it is important to view their stories through another lens than the therapeutic or pedagogic.

My fieldwork began shortly before three teenagers from the Israeli settlement of Alon Shvut, Eyal Yifrach (19), Gilad Shaar (16), and Naftali Frenkel (16), were kidnapped and murdered by Palestinian gunmen on 14 June 2014. This was followed two weeks later by the kidnap of a 15-year-old Palestinian boy from East Jerusalem, Mohammed Abu Khdeir, who was burned alive by a group of Israeli settlers. His body was dumped in a forested area near the remains of Deir Yassin, a destroyed Palestinian village that was the scene of a massacre by the pre-state Irgun militia in 1948. In leaving their victim’s body there, Abu Khdeir’s killers invoked the memory of the Nakba. Attributing the killings of Yifrach, Shaar, and Frenkel to Hamas paramilitaries, on 8 July 2014 the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) launched Operation Protective Edge, the stated aim of which was to destroy Hamas infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. According to a report produced by an independent commission of inquiry appointed in September 2014 by the United Nations’ Human Rights Council, 2014 witnessed the highest civilian death toll since 1967 largely as a result of this operation, in which
approximately 1461 Palestinian civilians and six Israeli civilians were killed. Minors constituted roughly a third of Gaza’s fatalities. The violence took on a personal face for me when a close friend’s cousins, four-year-old Qasem and six-year-old Emad, were killed when a shell hit their home. In 2015 a rash of stabbing and car-ramming attacks perpetrated by Palestinians began to spread outward from East Jerusalem, targeting both Israeli soldiers and civilians. According to data published by the Israeli intelligence services in February 2016, just over half the attackers were under the age of twenty. (Cohen 2016) This ongoing pattern of attacks has yet to take a formal name, but frequently surfacing terms are “the intifada of the knives” and “the intifada of the young.”

Gathering stories in Israel/Palestine from March 2014 until January 2016, I heard the violence narrated by young people themselves, often at its loci. Border zones are typically imagined as areas of peril, with one anthropologist summing up the terror and suspicion the concept inspires among settled (non-refugee) populations with “danger happens at the border.” (Haddad 2007:119) My interest in how stories are transmitted across or halted by borders took me into areas of high friction, such as the segregated Shuhadeh Street in Hebron; and Aida refugee camp, which is wedged against the separation barrier in northern Bethlehem and is the scene of frequent military incursions. Other forms of tension were present in the bilingual school and village I visited, established as a practical way of living peace: in the words of a Hebrew-language education kit on the Nakba, prepared by the Israeli remembrance organization Zochrot, “How do we say ‘Nakba’ in Hebrew?” In observing how young people living in these volatile border sites navigated their contested landscape and the histories that permeate it, I was reminded of the movement of tectonic plates, and came to think of the boundaries I was probing as fault lines. The geological imagery seemed apposite, not only because of the centrality of physical place to my work, but also due to the way earthquakes can push previously hidden things to the surface and cover or alter what previously stood there. The idea of fault lines captured the sense of immediate upheaval I experienced when I moved between the visible poverty and overcrowding of Aida refugee camp and the leafy affluence of nearby settlements in Gush Etzion. It also provided a metaphoric way of understanding the many shifting strata that emerged in young people’s stories, and despite the terror of the image (mirroring the volatility of their living situation), it also seemed to contain hope: that a place can change, and change quickly, and that familiar bloodstained and treacherous landscapes may not always look this way.

‘Israel/Palestine’ can be treated as a visual representation of this metaphor, with the stroke as the fault. I adopted this term partly out of a reluctance to let my research be
cantonized in the way that the region and its communities have been, recognizing that using names such as ‘West Bank’ uncritically may tacitly reinforce colonial divisions. My research is also concerned with the stories children tell about place, which means giving them the freedom to name it in a way that reflects their lived experience. In the words of Shaul Judelman, a settler from Gush Etzion who is active in Roots, a religiously inspired peace group, “Acre and Jaffa are no less Palestine than Ramallah and Hebron in people’s experience. Refugees still hold the keys to their homes from 1948. And Shechem (Nablus) and Hebron are a deep part of us [Jewish Israelis].” (Judelman 2016) But the term functions as more than an inclusive toponym. Palestinian youth would frequently use ‘Israel’ to mean the army, while some of their Israeli peers would say ‘Palestine’ for any predominantly Arab area where they were afraid to go. My use of ‘Israel/Palestine’ in place of more precise geographical indicators serves as a reminder that in this study place and community are about more than physical location; for all participants, these words denote social and cultural worlds that do not necessarily conform to the borders drawn on maps.

The remainder of this chapter is a literature review placing my research in its wider context. The first component deals with the development of collective and cultural memory as a theoretical concept, the second identifies current and long-established trends in storytelling research with conflict-affected youth, and the third examines the literature on the representation of youth in both popular and academic discourses on political violence, with particular reference to Israel/Palestine. Having provided the backdrop for the work to come, it explains how this project differs from much current research on storytelling in conflict zones, and identifies the lacunae that are being addressed.

Conceptualizing collective memory in Israel/Palestine
The idea of collective memory, which posits that each individual’s understanding of the past is mediated by her membership in a wider community, was developed by Maurice Halbwachs prior to the Holocaust. As a result, further work on collective memory has been inflected by the genocide, with the discipline of memory studies emerging in tandem with trauma studies. The interrelationship is apparent in four major theories that build on the idea of collective memory: postmemory (Hirsh 1992), cultural memory (Assman 2008), multidirectional memory (Rothberg 2009), and palimpsestic memory (Silverman 2013). These theories are critically evaluated here in relation to the study of intergenerational political violence and its legacy in Israel/Palestine.
Assman is concerned with the transmission of memory. He argues that this is not a focal point for Halbwachs and requires the idea of collective memory to be subdivided into communicative memory (Halbwachs’s original concept) and cultural memory. Defining memory as “a metonym based on contact between a remembering mind and a reminding object”, he focuses on the cultural repositories for such objects, the museums, libraries, and archives that give cultural memory its institutional character. By contrast, “communicative memory is noninstitutional…it lives in everyday interaction and communication and, for this very reason, has only a limited time depth…” (Assman 2008:111) In shifting attention from memory as it is mediated through interpersonal interaction to memory as it is mediated through objects, he not only foregrounds the institutions that preserve the object, but presents cultural memory as fundamentally material.

This emphasis on material culture informs Marianne Hirsch’s work on postmemory, which centres on Holocaust photographs. Initially coining the term to describe the relationship between the children of Holocaust survivors and the events they did not themselves experience, she argues that postmemory is differentiated from memory by generational distance and from history by its intimate nature. Our interaction with photographs (in the family living room as well as in the museum) represents a face-to-face encounter between generations, with the photograph providing a material reminder of its subject’s own materiality. Notably Hirsch’s theory concerns the second and third generation after the Holocaust; she is working within the timespan that Assman allots to communicative memory while remaining attentive to the ongoing process of mediation and transmission through visual culture, thereby bridging Assman’s concepts and demonstrating the permeable boundary between personal and collective memory. In describing it as “mediated by the processes of narration and imagination”, she also establishes a connection between postmemory and storytelling. (Hirsch 1992:8) However, this is not analysed in depth.

This emphasis on the material and the visual raises questions for the study of memory in Israel/Palestine. Research on the cultural memory of the Nakba has followed a similar trajectory, with scholars focusing on what Susan Slyomovics has termed “the object of memory”, epitomized by ruined houses and other physical traces. (Khalidi 1992; Slyomovics 1998; Benvenisti 2000; Kadman 2015) However, the village sites that dominate this scholarship are off-limits to the majority of Palestinians, who require army permits to exit the West Bank and Gaza, or who live as refugees in surrounding countries with little chance of entering present-day Israel. These distinct Palestinian populations constitute different sites of memory and experience. (Jayyusi 2007) Consequently, approaches to collective memory that
begin with the ruins in a broadly inaccessible landscape may actually erase rather than elucidate Palestinian relationships to the past. In her work on postmemory and the Nakba, Ronit Lentin argues that a preoccupation with the landscape on the part of Israeli scholars elides Palestinian subjectivity, with the result that Palestinians themselves become objects. (Lentin 2010:111-112) Any study of memory involving visual and material culture must be grounded in awareness that one purpose of military occupation’s infrastructure is to control what may be seen, and by whom (Weizman 2012; Hochberg 2015); and that the timbre of cultural memory is altered when the institutions central to its transmission are largely controlled by one ethno-national group. The importance of this can be seen through the Israeli scholar Gish Amit’s research on Palestinian-owned books that were confiscated during the Nakba and later catalogued as ‘absentee property’ in the Israel National Library. (Amit 2011) Like the village sites, these “reminding objects” are beyond reach for most Palestinians; their significance to Palestinian collective memory lies in their physical absence.

This realization leads us to the work of Max Silverman and Lila Abu-Lughod. Although the latter writes minutely about Jaffa as experienced through family visits and photographs, drawing on the concept of postmemory, she is clear that a significant mode of transmission is storytelling. Palestinian memory is “storied memory” (Abu-Lughod 2007:79), an idea present in the work of other Palestinian scholars. (Sayigh 2007; Masalha 2012) This necessitates a shift from theories of memory that emphasize material culture to a theory that incorporates oral/aural modes of transmission, a shift that is partially realized through Silverman’s idea of palimpsestic memory. Although the theory hinges on a strongly visual metaphor, its emphasis on hybridity makes it particularly relevant to a study that involves fractured societies and multiple sub-communities, in which memory and its transmission may assume different textures. Secondly, it was devised in response to the tendency “to compartmentalize memory on ethno-cultural lines and, hence, blinker the attempt to see multiple connections across space and time.” (Silverman 2013:4) While the previously discussed theories of memory are concerned with its transmission over time, palimpsestic memory incorporates space, illustrating the ways in which the memory of geographically distant events might interact. This is pertinent to Israel/Palestine, where narratives are understood in binary and polarizing terms, a rigid conceptualization that has generated significant interest in alternative ways of remembering. In a literary study of Jewish and Arab-authored texts that are little known in the Anglophone world, In Spite of Partition, Gil Hochberg concludes that paradoxically even separatist narratives and ideologies may testify to and nurture libidinal intimacy between Jews and Arabs (Hochberg 2007:6); while the
historian Eyal Naveh calls for a re-imagining of historical narrative as “a mosaic of intercommunicating stories and memories.” (Naveh 2006:268) Moving beyond Israel/Palestine, these ideas are finding expression in the broader field of memory studies.

Memory’s compartmentalization along ethno-national lines, mirroring territorial struggle, is at the crux of Michael Rothberg’s work. “Against the framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory – as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources – I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative.” (Rothberg 2009:3) According to this conception, memory becomes an active and participatory process rather than a static piece of property. Unlike Silverman, whose restricts his study to Francophone literature and films addressing the legacy of the Holocaust and French colonialism, Rothberg’s analysis spans continents and languages, examining the imbrication of Holocaust memory and that of slavery in the United States, and the memory of Vichy collaboration evoked by the French use of torture in Algeria. He ends his seminal book in Israel/Palestine, referring to Native American collective memory of violence in a way that emphasizes the relationship between Holocaust and Nakba memory: “Just as it is important for scholars in the United States to acknowledge the force of indigenous claims, it is crucial for scholars of the Holocaust to acknowledge the ways their topic intersects with another ongoing conflict.” (Rothberg 2009:311) The need to address the interaction between Holocaust memory and political violence in Palestine, past and current, is therefore framed as a question of justice.

This is particularly urgent given what Ilan Pappé has termed the memoricide of the Nakba (Pappé 2006), the systematic denial of ethnic cleansing that parallels the denial of Palestinian civil rights. Multidirectional memory enables us to probe the interrelationship between traumatic collective memories in an area where the national Holocaust memorial is built within sight of the massacre site at Deir Yassin, with one memory occluding the other, at least on the public level. Over the past two decades, Mizrahi [Eastern] Jewish scholars have turned their attention to this and similar topics. Sami Shalom Chetrit locates formal Holocaust remembrance in the context of Mizrahi class struggle in Israel and, drawing on his experiences as principal of a Mizrahi-majority school, examines how collective memory of the Holocaust might be brought into dialogue with that of other mass violence. (Chetrit 2009) Taking a postcolonial standpoint, Ella Shohat acknowledges that such conversations are engendered by a relational approach to history, made possible by “stressing the horizontal and vertical links that thread communities and histories together in a conflictual network.” (Shohat 2006:206) Attention to relationality and liminality makes it possible to tell stories
whose classification as ‘taboo’ has been deeply ingrained in cultural consciousness. Shohat’s primary interest is in visual culture, which influenced her wording: in speaking of taboo memory she alludes to the biblical proscription on graven images. (Shohat 2006:70)

However, in discussing taboo memory and its articulation by voices from the margins she is also concerned with the overlap between text and image, recognizing the overall significance of liminal spaces to memory studies.

Influenced by Shohat, our understanding of multidirectional memory can be expanded to include the interaction between different modes of transmission. All four theories outlined above focus on tangible cultural output, particularly photography, literature, and film.

However, as a consequence of their marginalization, the transmission of collective memory among subaltern groups is frequently oral. (Scott 1992) Expanding our conceptualization of multidirectional memory to include the interactions between these different modes, with an emphasis on orality, pushes us to remain attuned to the disparities in power that exist in Israel/Palestine. This provides a more nuanced understanding of how the development of collective memory is shaped by socio-political status, and how its transmission is affected by intra-community boundaries and fault lines. It also draws attention to the fluid border between the public and private spheres: the public sphere delineated by cultural institutions, the private sphere typified by home and family.

In keeping with memory studies’ preoccupation with the material and visual, much research on the memory of mass violence in Israel/Palestine has rested on the readily visible public sphere and the material curated by its institutions. Prominent studies on Palestinian engagement with Holocaust memory, for example, have focused exclusively on public discourse as represented by Arabic-language media and publishing, even arguing that the Holocaust was only ever addressed as part of polemical debates on Zionism. (Litvak and Webman 2003, 2009:7) Challenges to the way that such research has framed Palestinian engagement with the Holocaust solely in relation to Israeli political institutions still rely on the press and other cultural institutions. (Achcar 2011) Equally, attempts to consider Israeli and Palestinian engagement with both Holocaust and Nakba have been made in direct response – or at least with reference to – school curricula and public political discourse. (Sagy, Kaplan, and Adwan 2002; Bar-On and Sarsar 2004; Litvak-Hirsch, Chaitin, and Zaher 2010) As noted, this tendency to emphasize cultural memory’s custodial institutions over oral (and therefore subaltern) modes of transmission has affected memory studies as well as historiography, cementing distinctions between public and private, history and memory, text and speech, and even Palestinian and Israeli, with oral history still popularly viewed as the
preserve of the former and the archive as the territory of the latter. To challenge this compartmentalization of memory we require an approach that is sensitive to the interaction between modes of transmission.

Jo Roberts takes this approach in her research on the interplay between Holocaust and Nakba memory in Israel, the first full-length anthropological study of its kind. (Roberts 2013) She draws on a multiplicity of archival and oral sources that are suggestive of Silverman’s palimpsest in both their variety and the ways in which they inform and occlude one another. Her commitment to ethnographic methods enables her to circumvent the difficulties that have arisen in purely historical studies that draw on a multiplicity of sources in their examination of collective memory’s formation. For example, Menachem Klein concentrates on the day-to-day interactions between Jews and Arabs in the contested cities of Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Hebron rather than looking solely at the role of national institutions in mediating their relationship; the hybridity of his sources and the connections he draws across space and time are again palimpsestic. (Klein 2014) However, in writing about the private lives of public figures and emphasizing the intercommunity friendships they enjoyed, his work sometimes obfuscates the impact of repressive policies and how these shaped community relations on a broader level. This can lead to a romanticization of the idea of ‘lost’ memories of harmony, with questioning study of cultural memory’s formation and transmission being replaced by uncritical nostalgia. By adopting an anthropological approach that is also notable for its hybridity but that demands close attention to power dynamics, Roberts avoids this risk. Her work explicitly aims to encourage reconciliation, which could be read as an example of multidirectional memory’s intrinsic concern with justice.

While both the multidirectional and palimpsestic approaches connect cultural memory with questions of justice, they also define it in relation to trauma, a conflation that has become frequent and warrants scrutiny because of the way it has stripped descriptors such as victim and survivor of meaning. (LaCapra 1998:23) Roberts casts Israelis and Palestinians as survivors living out “unfinished trauma”, necessitating a close and empathic re-examination of “the original wounds and scars that defined the original conflict, and have defined its telling.” (Roberts 2013:20-21) The wound imagery is reminiscent of Cathy Caruth’s enduring metaphor for trauma as it relates to narrative and history: “a voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound.” (Caruth 1996:2) Similar ideas have informed the theories of memory evaluated here, which all deal with the rising of the repressed past and were developed in the shadow of the Holocaust; and their influence is seen in other work on Israeli and Palestinian cultural memory. John Collins titles his anthropological study of
collective memory among Palestinians who grew up in the First Intifada *Occupied by Memory*, drawing a parallel between memory and military force. (Collins 2004) The word ‘occupied’, closely associated in this context with terms such as ‘curfew’, ‘closure’, and ‘incursion’, invokes the psychoanalytic vocabulary of repression and displacement and suggests that to remember is itself to experience violence. There are clear ethical and methodological challenges in interpreting Israeli and Palestinian collective memory using a framework that not only presupposes trauma, but is permeated by it: its narrators may be read as victims in a manner that either presents them as passive, camouflages inequalities, or may not reflect their own understanding of how violence has affected them. Theories of memory that originated in relation to the Holocaust, “the black spider at the heart of European consciousness” (Lichtenstein and Sinclair 2000:193), are also open to charges of Eurocentrism even as they try to advance a multidirectional approach.

Paradoxically, psychoanalytic theory may offer a way to circumvent these problems, even though the enmeshment between trauma and cultural memory is partly due to the application of psychoanalytic terminology to memory studies. This is especially common in work that aims to cross, or at least query, the boundaries discussed earlier. It can lead to researchers blurring the boundary between the individual and the collective without any corresponding methodological adjustments, indiscriminately applying terms such as ‘remembering’, ‘forgetting’, and ‘repression’ to whole societies without acknowledging that in psychoanalytic theory these ideas originally referred to the individual psyche rather than to group processes. (Kansteiner 2002:186) The result is overextension of the trauma concept. However, the use of psychoanalytic terms to make sense of collective memory does not necessarily stem from this oversimplistic conflation, occurring when a collective tragedy such as the Holocaust or Nakba is transformed into the group’s primary historical referent. As noted by Jacqueline Rose, psychoanalysis is also concerned with ambivalence. Ambivalence, not trauma, could be seen as the primary characteristic of individual and communal relationships to the past in situations of intergenerational political violence. This understudied aspect of collective memory’s formation and transmission, which is the leitmotif of Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial work on cultural hybridity (1994) and has been discussed in relation to Israeli cultural memory (Zerubavel 1995; Rose 2007), may account for some of the interest in psychoanalytic trauma theory taken by scholars of collective memory, even if they do not openly address its possibilities. As seen, ambivalence distinguishes the questions of liminal identities raised by Chetrit and Shohat. Focusing on ambivalence enables us to work more effectively with theories of memory that were developed in the aftermath of mass violence, as
its inherent uncertainty reminds us to query our own expectations and assumptions about the lives and pasts we approach through storytelling.

**Storytelling with youth in situations of political violence**

The preoccupation with trauma that distinguishes the study of collective memory is present in research on storytelling with youth affected by political violence. According to one researcher, any biographical-narrative interview is a form of psychological intervention. (Rosenthal 2003:915) This perception of the therapeutic power of telling one’s story is also entrenched in humanitarian psychiatry. (Fassin and Rechtman 2009:212) An analysis of five hundred studies on mental health programs for youth living with political violence found that expressive arts such as storytelling or drama represented one of the most common treatment modalities (Jordans et al 2009:4), despite the current weak evidence base for arts-based approaches in psychological therapy. (Leckey 2011:501) The widespread yet contraindicated use of storytelling and other creative methods in humanitarian mental health settings and post-conflict situations may be attributable to the cultural conflation between trauma and (hi)story identified by La Capra, which has led to an assumption among practitioners that the only way to resolve trauma is through telling its story. This entrenched idea has been challenged by James Thompson as “a culturally particular approach” (Thompson 2009:48) that should not be imported unquestioningly to sites of disaster and mass violence. Instead he encourages respect for the “silence and the performance of not-telling”, which means stepping back from the Euro-American preoccupation with trauma that has shaped academic responses to history and memory. (Thompson 2009:59)

The tendency to associate history with trauma and storytelling with its therapy can be traced to Bruno Bettelheim’s work on psychoanalysis and fairy tale that he conducted following the Holocaust. (Bettelheim 1976) In discussing the meaning and importance of fairy tales in children’s lives, he concentrated on their therapeutic qualities. More recent work on fairy tale and the post-memory of mass violence has shifted attention to its communicative function, enabling traumatic stories that cannot be narrated openly to be passed through generations (Hennard Dutheil de la Rochere and Viret 2011), but the concern with trauma and healing remains central. (Haase 2000; Kidd 2005) Whether they are growing up with political violence or living with intergenerational memory of historic oppression, children are presented as trauma victims in need of intervention delivered by adults. This approach – in which storytelling is indistinguishable from such intervention – constrains children’s voices, limiting the scope of their stories. It also emphasizes the disparity in power between children
and adults, which is highlighted again by storytelling’s second major use among conflict-affected youth, as a peace education strategy.

A significant study of peace education programs for youth in Israel/Palestine found that narrative/storytelling approaches are used in 34% in programs. While less popular than approaches based on non-controversial and apolitical ideas of ontological equality or on practical projects that emphasize cooperative working, which together account for 60% of programs, the storytelling model has proliferated rapidly since its development in the 1990s. (Maoz 2011) It is grounded in the work of the influential Israeli psychologist Dan Bar-On. The debt to psychotherapy is apparent in the quasi-clinical language that appears in this appraisal, in which storytelling is presented as a means of “working through” trauma and resolving anger that has not yet found expression. Identical phrasing is used in relation to the To Reflect and Trust (TRT) storytelling model that has been implemented in reconciliation workshops with Israeli and Palestinian students, which was originally designed for use with descendants of Jewish Holocaust survivors and Nazi perpetrators. (Bar-On and Kassem 2004) Consequently it must be noted that the narrative approach almost always has personal healing at its crux, even if this is not articulated overtly by facilitators. More explicit in such programs is narrative’s pedagogic function, exemplified by the creation of a dual-narrative history textbook by teachers involved in the peace education research institute PRIME, developed over a decade. (Adwan, Bar-On, and Naveh 2012) This was not a collaborative project between teachers and students; the book’s twin narratives were written by adults for young people, suggesting that learning about the past is a unidirectional process. Furthermore, dual-narrative approaches risk entrenching ethno-nationalist binaries by assuming that storytellers must subscribe wholly to one of two mainstream narratives. This supposition is not only central to research on storytelling in situations of political violence but has been advanced as the definition of ethno-political conflict. (Senehi 2009:227)

Studies about the different narratives held by young people in Israel/Palestine have reinforced these perceptions. In one study, teenagers were presented with the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the establishment of Israel and the mass dispossession of Palestinians in 1948, the 1967 war, the First Intifada, the Oslo Accords, and the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and asked to give their views on the mainstream Israeli and Palestinian national narratives of these events. It was hypothesized that adolescents who were prepared to consider the merits of the ‘other’ narrative would be more likely to select a hopeful ending when asked to envisage the conflict’s future. (Sagy, Kaplan, and Adwan 2002) While the study provides insight into how Israeli and Palestinian youth relate to the
dominant national narratives surrounding these seven events, this is a separate question from how the young people personally conceive of and relate to these events, or even how significant they perceive them to be. As with the two dominant narratives, the options for conflict resolution were presented to the youth: they did not have the opportunity to create original responses. Paradoxically such research on the significance of narrative precludes young people from exploring cultural memory through telling their own stories. It was also hypothesized that acceptance of the legitimacy of the ‘other’ narrative would be positively correlated with an expectation that the conflict will be resolved through agreement and compromise, implying that ability to synthesize two polarized national narratives lies at the crux of peacemaking in Israel/Palestine. This process has been described as the construction of ‘bridging narratives’; in delineating the concept, Ilan Pappé draws illuminating parallels between storytellers and historians, whom he sees as navigating the ‘plots’ of the past. (Pappé 2006:194) However, as seen here, in much scholarship on peace education the idea of a ‘bridging narrative’ is emphasized to the exclusion of other kinds of story that might emerge if the young people were given greater freedom to narrate.

In order for youth voices to be heard, it is necessary to understand storytelling as more than a unidirectional pedagogic method for moulding students’ perspectives or a means of therapy. The scholar and practitioner Jack Zipes has observed that when it is rooted in their everyday lives and struggles, storytelling can enable young people to participate actively in community-building. In what he terms an ‘anti-manual’ for storytelling with children, he presents storytelling as a possible challenge to consumerist educational approaches that emphasize spectacle, competition, and success. (Zipes 1995) This reference to competitive aspects of education evokes Rothberg’s concept of competitive memory, while the notion of success is reminiscent of nationalistic ideas of victory that are embedded in textbooks and school curricula in both Israel/Palestine and other situations of political violence and structural inequality. (Bar-Tal 2005; Cole 2007; Peled-Elhanan 2012) While textbook narratives are instrumental in forging collective memory on the formal level (Podeh 2000), adopting the approach to storytelling taken by Zipes may enable young people to interact with the past and narrate their present-day lives in a different way. Most of the examples given by Zipes in his work on storytelling and community-building are drawn from creative practice in schools, but here the school is treated simply as a type of community and one locus for children’s community activism rather than as an institution responsible for teaching children to approach stories in a particular way. Consequently Zipes has been able to expand
discussion of storytelling’s pedagogic potential in a manner that has yet to happen in the field of peace education.

This potential was illustrated by a longitudinal study examining the civic impact of a storytelling and creative writing project in an inner-city American elementary school. (Madigan and Koivu-Rywicki 1997) The researchers used stories written by one child about suicide, deprivation, and gun violence to demonstrate how the process of creating a story can enable a person to express and interpret experiences of violence for the benefit of the affected community, providing a framework and language in which such topics may be discussed by others around them. This and similar stories acted as conduits between home and school, revealing how the young people imagined and interacted with their communities. It also demonstrates storytelling’s capacity to blur the boundary between public and private space, a capacity that Hannah Arendt identified as explicitly political. (Arendt 1958:50) Michael Jackson expands on Arendt’s idea through anthropological research on storytelling, violence, and intersubjectivity that focuses on storytelling’s ability to transgress existing social boundaries and radically rework people’s notions of community. Using spatial terminology, he defines storytelling as constituting “sites of defilement and infringement.” (Jackson 2002:25) This language is grounded in Mary Douglas’s landmark work on taboo and pollution (Douglas 1966), which has more recently been applied to the study of forced migration and refugees. (Malkki 1995; Haddad 2007) Due to its politically transgressive function in blurring the public and private spheres, storytelling can compromise national purity in the same way that refugees and stateless persons threaten it by existing outside the defined category of the nation-state. As scholars in the fields of postcolonial and memory studies have arrived independently at a similar concern with ambivalence and liminality, it would be instructive to consider storytelling’s transgressive qualities and their implication for community-building in relation to memory’s transmission in situations of intergenerational political violence.

Previous work on the politics of storytelling has focused on its role in protest movements. Francesca Polletta has conducted a powerful analysis of storytelling as protest in a range of settings, from sixteenth-century tax revolts to the American civil rights movement, concluding that the stories with the greatest political cachet are those that are complex and ambiguous. (Polletta 2006:107) However, her work focuses on storytelling in official public spaces, such as courtrooms and newsrooms. Jackson’s cross-cultural study is rare in its focus on the everyday lived experience of political violence as it is manifested through storytelling, spanning the public and the private spheres. Yet young people are noticeably absent. All
Jackson’s informants are adults, and as seen, few studies on young people’s storytelling in conflict zones discuss its civic and political aspects. These aspects are identified in a digital storytelling project from Israel/Palestine that set out to understand how technology can reconfigure community in conflict-affected societies. (Buckner and Kim 2012) However, the write-up is heavily focused on the project’s relevance to formal peace education and the facilitators’ main reaction to the children’s stories was concern for their mental health, demonstrating how deep-seated the presupposition of trauma remains in creative arts research with conflict-affected youth. The study was further constrained by its reliance on quantitative survey data that measured attitudes to violence among young Israelis and Palestinians, which it accepted as evidence that youth living with political violence need to be supported to develop empathy. Analysis of such intransigent attitudes captured in survey data from Israel/Palestine has found that respondents’ answers vary depending on current events (Smooha 2010), suggesting that surveys may be better understood as political barometers rather than indicators of stable beliefs. (Roberts 2013:158) In treating survey data as representative of their participants’ ideas about violence and coexistence, the researchers contributed to the polarizing distinction between Israeli and Palestinian that they were aiming to undo through digital storytelling. Any study concerned with the reworking of borders and the significance of liminal space, such as that represented by the digital platform, needs to be cautious when incorporating quantitative data in order to avoid reinforcing such concrete boundaries. Additionally, storytelling research with conflict-affected youth needs to avoid using established national narratives as a touchstone and to allow the young people to find their own starting-point, in order to gain a more accurate image of how they imagine and narrate community.

Storytelling projects that are interested in young people as political actors and citizens are underway. YouCitizen is a comparative ethnographic research project that uses story mapping techniques to understand how youth living in divided post-conflict societies relate to place and conceptualize belonging. It identifies storytelling as “a social and spatial practice” that does not occur in isolation, but rather in collaboration with others, and digital storytelling in particular as “a valuable technique for triangulating between history, memory, and the material traces of the past embedded in everyday surroundings.” (Marshall, Staeheli et al 2015:3–4) This definition highlights the connections between storytelling, memory, and community and challenges the emphasis on trauma created through medico-legal language and testimony. Referring to post-conflict cities as “palimpsestic spaces”, as traces of former destruction are often visible in reconstruction and reconciliation efforts, it seeks to understand
how young people navigate such spaces and promotes their citizenship and civic participation as essential to justice and lasting peace. So far storytelling research has been conducted in South Africa, Lebanon, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, with the project’s remit expanding to new countries. Digital storytelling was chosen as it incorporates visual and oral elements, itself suggestive of a palimpsest. The method is significant because it expands the definition of ‘storytelling’ beyond the autobiographical narrative that predominates in psychotherapeutic literature and the idea of twin historical narratives that is established in peace education, allowing the young people to determine what constitutes a story. It also gives autonomy to the participants: equipped with video cameras, young people are able to choose where to film their stories and to tell them without intervention from or even the presence of the facilitators.

The creative writing project that inspired this research also gave its teenage participants a high level of autonomy, but this was unplanned. Ninth-grade students were encouraged to keep English-language diaries during the military curfews as a way to maintain their proficiency. As curfew meant that the teenagers had limited contact with their teachers, they wrote unsupervised, resulting in a candid body of writing that deals with political questions of youth activism, civic participation, and civil rights. (Atallah and van Teeffelen 2004) Some entries are critical of the education system, while others are written in Arabic, suggesting that the teenagers had ceased to perceive this as an English homework assignment but had taken full ownership of the project. To date the diaries have received no academic attention. Although there is a growing interest in digital storytelling in Israel/Palestine as a way of empowering youth and stressing narrative agency (Sawhney 2009; Norman 2009), storytelling projects undertaken after the Second Intifada have conformed to the more directive narrative approaches discussed above. While the transgressive potential of storytelling has been noted, with stories being presented as a means of “border crossing” (a term that expresses storytelling’s potential to remap community), dominant pedagogies of peace have led facilitators to see storytelling workshops as “enabling students to become border-crossers” through “learning about diversity.” (Elbaz-Luwisch 2001:81) This phrasing suggests that the real crossing-point is the adult-led workshop rather than storytelling itself, indicating a lacuna in creative arts research. In order to understand storied memory among young people and its implications for their conceptualization of community, there is a need for storytelling research that consciously avoids aligning itself with any explicit therapeutic or pedagogic goal, and that as far as possible allows participants to determine its direction.

Youth as an “imagined community” in situations of political violence
Before examining the ways in which conflict-affected young people imagine and interpret community through the stories they tell about the past, it is important to establish how they are themselves imagined and represented, as the telling and wider reception of their stories is influenced by socio-political discourses on childhood. As discussed, young people living with political violence are frequently presented as trauma victims in need of therapy or as students who require education for peace. These representations of children are rooted in the language used to describe child rights in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which promotes a discourse of protection over one of civic participation. This has resulted in a longstanding conceptual gap between the idea of ‘rights’ and ‘protection’. (Bhabha 2006)

This makes it difficult to approach children as political subjects, as in much scholarship and humanitarian practice they are presented as passive recipients of either abuse or care, epitomized by fundraising photographs that show a hungry child clutching an empty bowl. In such images the child is typically pictured alone, her family and wider community invisible, inviting the viewer to imagine himself as the sole connection and source of support. (Wells 200:39)

The literature on the use of child soldiers encapsulates the tension between rights and protection-based approaches, as the image of a child carrying a gun sparks debates on agency, culpability, and the fundamental definition of childhood. David Rosen argues that humanitarian discourses on violence treat childhood as a universal state distinguished by universal developmental needs and untouched by context. Disconnectedness from history is one of the main characteristics of this universalized representation of childhood. (Rosen 2015) Such representations extend beyond child soldiers to include conflict-affected young people as a whole, and determine how their relationships to history, memory, and community are understood. This suggests that it is necessary to approach children as political actors before their role in shaping collective memory and community through narrative can be grasped. Rosen also states that modern-day Western experiences of war are mediated through temporal and spatial distance and an array of civil society and human rights organizations, “all of which…serve to ascribe war to a distant and alien ‘other’.” (Rosen 2015:186) This process of abstraction and othering makes it easier to abstract conflict-affected children from their immediate contexts and to recast them in the mould of the vulnerable universal child.

Recent research critiques this imagery and stresses children’s agency, decision-making capabilities, and local context. Christine Ryan, interviewing former child soldiers in South Sudan, concludes that enlistment was an expression of the young people’s political consciousness and that such consciousness could even be present in incidences of forced
conscription. (Ryan 2012) She details the practical benefits that young people gained from enlistment, along with the sense of civic and national responsibility imparted by their identity as soldiers. However, Ryan overcompensates in her attempt to correct a fixation with vulnerability that has led to a sentimentalized perception of conflict-affected children, and her work ultimately minimizes the structural violence experienced by children in the army. As they are not accorded the same rights as adults and do not hold the same power, children constitute a disenfranchised political class. (Bhabha 2006) By treating their participation in hostilities as a choice, whether pragmatic or political, Ryan advances a neoliberal view that stresses individual autonomy over systemic practices that privilege certain groups above others. Her analysis is critical of NGOs that attempt to ‘restore’ former soldiers to a utopian ideal of childhood, but several criticisms are grounded in interviews with former or current army officers, meaning that she essentially promotes the idea of childhood held by senior combatants over the idea of childhood particular to humanitarian organizations. The former attempt to erase the boundary between children and adults, creating one community that elides questions of power and control; the latter imagine children as a special group, often dislocating them from their wider social context. This dichotomy continues to characterize the current debates on childhood in humanitarian research and practice.

Competing ideas of childhood are also present in debates on children and violence in Israel/Palestine. The image of Palestinian children as terrorists in training or victims of their own nation’s violence is encapsulated by Golda Meir’s infamous saying that peace would be achievable when “the Arabs love their children more than they hate us.” Contesting a report by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (now Child Soldiers International), which declared that it had found no evidence of systematic recruitment of children among Palestinian militias during the Second Intifada, David Rosen claims that the conviction that children have a duty to sacrifice themselves for Palestine is part of a Palestinian “cultural idiom” (Rosen 2005:131) and that an overrepresentation of Palestinian interests in humanitarian forums prevents international monitoring organizations from recognizing its prevalence. (Rosen 2005:153) By opening his chapter on militancy among Palestinian youth with the farewell speech of an 18-year-old female suicide bomber, Ayat al-Akhras, without placing her involvement in its numerical context, Rosen implies that the involvement of minors in the suicide bombing campaigns was widespread when in reality the number was low. (Yom and Saleh 2004:3) To buttress such arguments about prevalence, he observes that the paramilitary leader Izzedin al-Qassam is “remembered for having childlike qualities” among Palestinians (Rosen 2005:101), suggesting that this denotes a cultural connection
between militancy and childhood. Rosen also describes young Palestinians’ participation in political demonstrations, without elucidating the supposed connection between demonstrating and child soldiering. While these arguments are tenuous, they do accurately reflect how Palestinian children are perceived by Israeli military authorities. A report by a delegation of British lawyers noted that “it may be that the reluctance to treat Palestinian children in conformity with international norms stems from a belief, which was advanced to us by a military prosecutor, that every Palestinian child is a ‘potential terrorist’.” (Perera and Razack 2014:43) As such, Palestinian children are indistinguishable from adults in Israeli public discourse on security, or distinguishable only by their passivity; they are imagined as victims of violent brainwashing, and all their political activity is interpreted as militancy.

Research on Palestinian children’s experiences of forced migration provides insight into how childhood is constructed and youth represented within refugee communities in the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. (Chatty and Hundt 2005) Children were portrayed as “helpless” by their caregivers, and while the young people themselves had a very different sense of themselves as politically conscious and as active contributors to their communities, parents in all field sites defined childhood in terms of heightened vulnerability, inadequate provision of play spaces, and a lack of social and educational opportunities. Behaviour problems were another common theme, with caregivers pointing to a time when childhood was marked by deference and respect for elders, and expressing frustration that their own children’s behaviour did not match this ideal. Other parents framed behaviour problems in terms of psychological distress, expressing concern for their children’s mental health in a way that reinforced the idea of childhood as a time of heightened emotional fragility (adult mental health was rarely mentioned by interviewees). There has been no work specifically focusing on representations of children and childhood in Palestinian societies, but the picture that emerges through studies on other topics is consistent. Adult informants present the child as helpless, with the bulk of research (including that by Palestinian scholars) focusing on trauma, resultant care needs, and trauma’s parallel concept, psychological resilience.

Examining media coverage of atfal al-hijara [children of the stones, the term that attached itself to Palestinian youth activists during the First Intifada], John Collins finds that youth are hyper-visible but inaudible: photographs of teenagers clutching stones and giving V signs are ubiquitous, while their voices are absent from the public sphere. He suggests that by transforming young people confronting tanks into “political caricatures”, media representations of atfal al-hijara have perpetuated the idea that their activism speaks for
itself, rendering an analysis of their social and political consciousness unnecessary. The stone-throwing child has become emblematic in Palestinian society, representing *sumud* [steadfastness] and epitomizing the collective memory of the First Intifada, which is frequently known as the Uprising of the Stones. In attempting to shift the focus from the image of stone-throwing children to their stories, Collins underlines the significance of storytelling in memory studies, effecting a second shift away from the previously discussed emphasis on material and visual culture that predominates in this field. His concern with the young people’s stories makes them visible as political subjects.

Israeli youth have also been rendered invisible in the public sphere through a similar process of political caricaturing that reduces them to potential army conscripts. While Palestinian children recur frequently in Israeli public discourse on terror, their Israeli counterparts are virtually absent from Palestinian representations of political violence. Reflecting on his childhood experiences, an adult man interviewed in a study on refugee youth in Gaza commented, “We imagined Israelis as an army without families.” (Thabet and Abuateya 2005:159) In Palestinian literature written post-1967, the principal Israeli characters are often soldiers, suggesting that this perception is common. (Somekh 1989) The reasons behind this absence of children have never been investigated in depth. Equally, there has been little research on how Israeli children are represented within their own societies. Their role as future soldiers is highlighted, along with the significance of the education system in preparing them for conscription. (Furman 1999; Peled-Elhanan 2012) There is a small body of work indicating that following the First Intifada, the popular image of soldiers as strong and socially responsible adults was replaced by the infantilizing idea of soldiers as dependent youngsters, a trend captured by Doren Rosenblum’s sardonic 1994 headline ‘Honey, the soldiers have shrunk.’ Viewed through a psychological lens, this ‘shrinking’ of soldiers in Israeli popular imagination may allow conscripts’ parents to express anxieties over their children’s welfare and to cope better with the pressures conscription places on the family. (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 2012:303) However, such representations may also serve a political purpose, due to the common association of childhood with a state of moral innocence.

Sociologists working across several cultures have questioned the place of ‘childhood innocence’ in the construction of childhood, usually focusing on its import for children’s sexuality. (Kitzinger 1988; Bhana 2007; Taylor 2010) These critiques can also be applied to children’s experiences of political violence and the construction of the enemy figure. For example, the panic around ‘stranger danger’ feeds the idea that children are at risk from
unknown predators who may strike at any moment, although 90% of sexual assaults on children are committed by adults known to the victim. (Robinson 2013:ix) Prevailing cultural attitudes locate the threat to the child outside the family circle, among the faceless unknown. Through the depiction of soldiers as child-like, this dynamic is transposed onto the conflict in Israel/Palestine; although army data indicates that suicide and fratricide have consistently accounted for the highest percentage of annual deaths in the Israel Defence Forces in recent years (Cohen 2012), the threat lies outside the social group. Additionally, the idea of childhood innocence may be seen as carrying moral currency, which could explain both the rarity with which Israeli children appear in Palestinian public discourse and the way in which Palestinian children are presented as inherently guilty in Israeli society, their innocence contaminated by Palestinian adults. As children have become symbols of moral purity and consequently political legitimacy, childhood itself has emerged as a contested space; the other side’s legitimacy is discredited through questioning the innocence of its children.

Robert Coles’ longitudinal study on the political lives of conflict-affected children moves away from these tropes, foregrounding young people’s political consciousness and the role they play within their communities while remaining sensitive to the contested nature of childhood. (Coles 1986) He worked with young people in volatile contexts for over three decades. Aside from the long-term relationships he developed with his informants and their families, which enabled him to amass a large body of detailed material, his study is distinctive in its inclusion of polarized subcommunities: in Brazil he researched in favelas and in affluent neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro; while in South Africa he interviewed young people who were variously classified as black, coloured, and white Afrikaaner. A key observation is that academics and practitioners may be reluctant to understand children’s narratives as expressions of political thought, instead interpreting them in relation to the child’s ethnicity, social class, or other situational rubrics. This cantonization of young people’s experiences results in a fragmentary understanding of how children imagine and participate in community, as well as a series of fragmented representations of children and childhood. Coles gives particular attention to how young people imagine and narrate the Other, and his involvement in different subcommunities resulted in a nuanced comparative study of children’s political thought around belonging and identity. Although his work has methodological limitations (he frequently condenses conversations that took place over years into one dialogue, thereby becoming a co-narrator), it is still effective in establishing children as political subjects.
As yet there has been little comparable work involving both Israeli and Palestinian youth, with the exception of Phillip Hammack’s study on the politics of identity among young people in the region, which recognizes that overarching nationality is only one element of self-concept and that local contexts are equally important in its development. (Hammack 2011) Perhaps due to methodological constraints surrounding trust and access, most studies do not involve children from multiple subcommunities, unless they are carried out within the framework of coexistence and peace education groups. Proposing the term ‘multiplexity’ to encompass the different sources that nurture identity, a concept that he is careful to differentiate from ambivalence, Andrew Gee also acknowledges the significance of local context in identity’s formation, explaining his decision to exclude Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and haredi [ultra-Orthodox] Jewish Israelis from his research on citizenship and army service on the basis that these minorities are diverse enough to require separate analysis. (Gee 2009) In addition, he feels it important for his work to reflect the separations that exist in Israeli society. However, in reflecting such separations, there is a possibility that current literature on childhood in Israel/Palestine may be contributing to them. This is particularly true of the ethno-national binary that is typified by dual-narrative approaches to story-based peace education, which leads researchers to identify children and interpret their stories in accordance with the two national categories and within adult constructions of childhood.

Recognizing the prevalence of those constructions, especially the powerful “iconography of childhood” that ensure helpless innocence is foregrounded even among humanitarian organizations that stress a rights-based participatory approach (Manzo 2008), in my own research I have chosen to write about youth or young people rather than attempting to prise the word ‘child’ away from the tropes of purity and defencelessness. ‘Youth’ covers a broader age range and better matches the self-descriptors used by Israeli and Palestinian participants (shabab in Arabic, tsa’irim or no’arim in Hebrew) while ‘young person’ emphasizes personhood, to which voice and story are fundamental.

The present study in context: research questions and chapter outline

The axioms undergirding this study are that memory is intrinsic to how community is imagined and narrated, that storytelling is fundamental to the creation of both community and collective memory, and that these processes of creation and interpretation may be understood as a socio-political act. It builds on the theories of collective memory delineated in the literature review, especially the idea of memory as multidirectional and palimpsestic. In
describing the spatial and temporal aspects of multidirectional memory, Michael Rothberg defines temporality chiefly in relation to major historical events, and through literature, film, and other cultural output he charts how memories have intersected and interacted with each other over protracted periods of time. Storytelling with youth requires the concept to be extended, as the stories are not always structured around significant historical and universally recognizable temporal landmarks. Here multidirectionality includes transmission across and between generations, in both directions: the stories that youth hear from members of preceding generations and also the stories that they tell them. In applying the theory of multidirectional memory to stories told in and about everyday circumstances, such as the family dinner table, this study unites creative practice with anthropology, cultural geography, and comparative literature. The interdisciplinary approach reflects the study’s questioning approach to borders and boundaries.

As John Collins has noted, Palestinian narratives have rarely been studied as narratives – “that is, as creative constructions of the past told in particular circumstances for particular reasons that are not always self-evident, not even for the teller.” Instead these stories are approached as evidence to support a particular historical understanding or political perspective. (Collins 2004:12) The same holds true for the study of Israeli stories. This study locates storytelling and its import for community and memory outside what Collins terms “the documentary model”, retaining his focus on stories as stories and expanding it to give greater attention to storytelling’s linguistic and literary aspects. It also remains attuned to narrative agency, which means retaining an awareness of each story’s many possibilities and functions rather than reducing stories to testimony.

While the project was inspired by the cultural memory of the Holocaust among Palestinians, building on Jo Roberts’s contention that collective memory in Israel/Palestine is inflected by genocide and ethnic cleansing, it recognizes the limitations of treating these events as the most natural interpretative framework for participants’ stories. Rather than beginning with the assumption that the stories will be connected to the Holocaust and the Nakba, it examines if, when, and how such connections are made; and stories in which these events are central are not treated as automatically more significant in young people’s narration of community and memory than stories containing more quotidian material. This is not to dispute the formative role played by mass violence in the emergence of Israeli and Palestinian cultural memory, but to examine more precisely how the memory of that violence interacts with other memories through storytelling. Whereas all the work discussed above has analysed collective memory, its narratives, or its multidirectional nature in relation to distinct
events, such as the First Intifada, this project does not take any time period or event as its lodestone: the foci are the young people’s stories themselves, and the narrators identify their own historical referents. This approach is notable for its fluidity, which again raises the questions of borders and how they are traversed or cemented through narrative.

This theme has been examined by Michael Jackson in his research on violence, storytelling, and intersubjectivity, but as noted, the fieldwork did not involve young people. Expanding the discussion on storytelling and intersubjectivity to include young storytellers prompts consideration of young people’s role in creating community through narrative, and questions the tendency to categorize their storytelling as either educational or therapeutic. By concentrating on youth who inhabit a border area or fault line of some kind, this study also highlights the interplay between space and memory, and complicates the use of nationality as a system for cataloguing stories gathered in Israel/Palestine and other situations of political violence. Instead it treats stories as liminal spaces that allow for ambivalence and invite a multidirectional interpretative approach, enabling us to think beyond existing ethnic, national, and disciplinary categories without denying the impact that the categorization process has on subjects’ lives. These concerns can be distilled into the following questions:

- How might conflict-affected young people inhabiting Israel/Palestine’s fault lines relate to history and memory through storytelling, particularly hidden histories and taboo memories?
- What are the chief characteristics of stories told in such liminal spaces, and what implications do they hold for the study of political violence in the region and its impact on the lives of young people?
- How does this storytelling process affect young people’s conceptualization of self, other and community?

This chapter has reviewed the literature pertaining to these questions and outlined the project’s scope, while Chapter 2 sets out its methodology in detail, identifying it as narrative ethnography grounded in phenomenology. It describes the field sites and the rationale behind their choice. Chapter 3 is an examination of the role of symbol, metaphor, and other linguistic features in the narration of unseen landscapes (geographical, social, and historical) to which the young people’s access is impossible or restricted. It begins by considering fairy tale as an idiomatic means of exploring such landscapes, especially those that inspire fear; progresses to an analysis of the symbols that recur in the stories; and closes with a discussion of bilingual
culture, the friction and power dynamics between Hebrew and Arabic, and the import that the language of narration has for the young people’s storytelling, particularly narration of place. Chapter 4 turns to the people who populate these places, analysing violence and empathy in the narration of self and other. Drawing on the phenomenological theory of Emanuel Levinas, it argues that oral storytelling possesses a fundamentally violent quality, and examines manifestations of narrative violence in storytelling sessions organized by peace and coexistence groups aimed at youth. It considers storytelling as a means of transgressing boundaries and remaking notions of community, before discussing young people’s curiosity over the role they might play in stories told by members of the ‘other’ community, and how they represent those others in their own stories. Moving onto the acts of mass violence that dominate cultural memory in Israel/Palestine, Chapter 5 analyses how young people living in these contested spaces interact with forbidden history through storytelling, such as the Holocaust and the Nakba. It concludes with a discussion of how storytelling fosters an ambivalent and ultimately more empathetic approach to forbidden history that allows more inclusive conceptions of community to develop. Chapter 6 considers the ways in which young people narrate and imagine endings, incorporating a structural and thematic analysis of the endings they construct for their own stories as well as the endings they imagine for political violence itself. This chapter also details the principal themes that have emerged in the research. The conclusion locates the findings within the context of existing and ongoing research, providing a framework for further work.
Chapter Two – Methodology: How to Tell Stories in Tear Gas

A phenomenological approach to narrative ethnography

This project is best understood as narrative ethnography, as it combines text-based methods of narrative inquiry with ethnography’s interest in “the everyday contours of the storying process”, taking into account not only the stories that are told but the narrative environments that nurtured them and how the tellers relate to their social contexts through storytelling. (Gubrium and Holstein 2008:249) Ethnography itself can be defined as a genre of storytelling, demonstrated by the way that theoretical concepts and narrative structures that ethnographers use to make sense of their informants’ experiences change over time. These conceptual and structural changes indicate a shift in vocabulary and syntax respectively, taking us into the territory of story, with the ethnographer and informant as co-navigators. (Bruner 1986)

The practice of narrative ethnography to date is inflected by postmodernist and poststructuralist understandings of performativity and identity, perhaps due to the ease of drawing a parallel between the social construction of concepts such as ‘past’, ‘present’, ‘community’, ‘self’, and ‘nation’ and the constructed nature of narratives themselves. In postmodernist narrative ethnography, the chief function of storytelling is “the rewriting of personal identities and social realities”, a process that is enabled by performativity, the “reiterative power of discourse to create and produce the phenomena it regulates and constrains.” (Tedlock 2011:334) In her analysis of the authorial quality of ethnography, Kirsten Hastrup defines anthropology more broadly as “the postmodern narrative par excellence: multivocal, heteroglot and essentially inexhaustive.” (Hastrup 1992:127) In my own work I have chosen to distance myself from postmodern approaches and their vocabularies, particularly the concept of performativity, for reasons apparent in Hastrup’s work. She presents violence as “inherent” to ethnography, resulting from a hierarchy that places the interlocutor over the informant. Through ethnographic co-authorship,

both parties are engaged in a joint creation of selfness and otherness, but the apparent symmetry at the level of dialogue is subsumed by a complicated asymmetry…[T]he ethnographic dialogue is twisted by the fact that the ethnographer’s questions are unsolicited, and that they will of necessity shape the answers…We hardly respect our informants’ right to fall silent. Probing into cultural silences may be an act of symbolic violence, but it is violence nonetheless. (Hastrup 1992:121)

In treating such violence as symbolic, Hastrup minimizes its dangers, noting that ethnography is not oppressive if ethnographers remain aware that they and their informants “are both
subjects engaged in a process of objectifying our reciprocal identities”, a process through which “difference is transcended.” (Hastrup 1992:127) As discussed in the preceding chapter, narrative-based peace programs that encourage participants to transcend difference and find points of connection through storytelling are common in Israel/Palestine. (Maoz 2011) Reducing intergenerational political violence to a question of conflicting personal and social identities, to be resolved through the telling of different stories, is only possible through the contention that “‘facts’ have no independent existence” (Hastrup 1992:127) and that distinctions between teller and listener may be erased through the performative approaches to ethnography, which treat the field “as simultaneously everywhere and nowhere”, meaning that “everyone is in some sense an insider.” (Tedlock 2011:334) These contentions are jarring when transposed onto a space that is criss-crossed by walls, checkpoints, and segregated road networks, in which people are treated differently under the law according to the colour of the identity card they carry. The linguistic deconstruction of categories such as ‘class’ and ‘ethnicity’ can make it difficult to conduct any kind of class analysis; and as such analysis is essential to grasping and challenging systematic oppression, postmodernist approaches that stress the concept of deconstruction (most notably poststructuralism) may clash with struggles for justice and liberation that are organized along class lines, leading to a focus on the individual over the collective that has “many resonances with neo-liberalism…[and] serious consequences for the politics of equality.” (Crompton 2008:26)

Equally, performativity as applied to speech-acts, and consequently to storytelling, is concerned primarily with the individual teller: “I do” is not just an assertion, but an act. However, when listening to the stories of oppressed people, it is impossible to focus on what they do through language without also recalling what is being done to them. Judith Butler, one of the most prominent poststructuralist theorists of performativity, rarely uses the term in her two books on political violence, and only in passing; she does not explain how the concept might be applied in these situations without obfuscating the realities of persecution. An approach that treats identity as performed rather imposed has limitations in situations of political violence; and concern with the socially constructed nature of language can become repressive when applied to terms such as ‘justice’ and ‘freedom.’ This leads to an unwitting denial of lived experience, especially among marginalized groups. “What we used to call ‘what happened to her’ has become, at its most credible, ‘narrative.’ Real harm has ceased to exist.” (MacKinnon 1999:702) James Thompson extends this criticism to encompass a theoretical lexicon that is used across the diverse breadth of postmodernist scholarship:
Do we really interrogate texts, unpack experiences, deconstruct utterances? In Sri Lanka detainees are interrogated (and tortured), bags or belongings are unpacked (and searched) and houses are deconstructed by bombs (and reconstructed by families and communities)…Why doesn’t theory go the whole hog and torture texts, frisk/body search performances and bomb speech acts? In light of a world order woven with terror – actual, displayed, and imagined – a language of enquiry that litters texts with verbs of breakage, dismembering and dislocation seems callous…I would prefer to celebrate acts of construction, healing, holding and re-membering. And find a vocabulary that rewards these acts. (Thompson 2005:243)

Thompson’s critique calls to mind another challenge posed by the application of this lexicon to situations of political violence: the decentring or ‘displacement’ of author/teller by reader/listener, a concept originating with Derrida that permeates poststructuralist writing. (Krupnick 1983) The idea of young storytellers who already inhabit a social or political margin being ‘decentred’ or ‘displaced’ by their hearers is a painful one, especially in light of historic ethnic cleansing and ongoing acts of displacement in Palestine/Israel. Without dismissing the significance and weight of other poststructuralist ideas – the idea of destabilization, for example, is central to my own exploration of violence in narrative – I was searching for a theoretical vocabulary that would better reflect, and respect, my participants’ experience. Phenomenological theory is intimately concerned with this relationship between language and experience, which encouraged me to remain attuned to words – those of my participants, and my own – and also left me determined to find a vocabulary that rewards acts orientated towards peace, even as I wrote about abuse and violence. This is one reason why, in exploring the ambiguities in participants’ stories, I settled on the nuanced and more promising term ‘ambivalence’ rather than the stark and accusatory ‘contradiction’. Ambivalence grew into one of the major themes of the project.

Phenomenological theory is also fundamentally relational, epitomized by Levinas’s classic work on the face as a metaphor for human intersubjectivity. In the face he sees not only “the precariousness of the stranger” but an ethical imperative for social justice and “the pure denuding exposure without defence” that makes it possible to listen to the other and receive her story. (Levinas 1996:161) The face-to-face relation is central to oral storytelling, and it has also emerged as a powerful and haunting motif in Palestinian and Israeli Jewish engagements with forbidden and alternative histories. Linda Dittmar, a Jewish woman who lived through the Nakba, uses faces in her story to signal her growing but unspoken awareness of what had occurred. (Dittmar 2010) Her story opens with the faces of displaced children looking out from Fureidis, glimpsed from the car as a child; and closes with faces frozen in black-and-white at a Nakba photography exhibit, seen as an adult. Reflecting on an
oral history project on the Nakba narratives of Palestinian women with Israeli citizenship, which caused significant discomfort and hostility in her faculty, the anthropologist Fatma Kassem wrote: “I have never asked my Jewish friends and colleagues about their family experiences of this time period, nor have I voluntarily offered them insight into my family history. I felt guilt mixed with moral remorse at having ‘betrayed’ my Jewish friends and colleagues by not revealing to them my ‘true Palestinian face.’” (Kassem 2011:74) This connection between faces and forbidden histories also becomes apparent in testimonies of former Israeli soldiers recorded by the activist organisation Breaking the Silence. One soldier, on making eye contact with a Palestinian child, found that his political convictions were so shaken by the encounter that he mentally named her “the girl who stole my Holocaust”; this became the title of an autobiographical account of his military service and later involvement with Breaking the Silence. (Chayut 2013) While writing gives the author a certain privacy, guaranteed by the distance from both reader and subject, the face-to-face element of oral storytelling captures both the friction and the intimacy inherent in such encounters with the other and her stories. This is why I identified it as the creative art form that perhaps has most to contribute to our understanding of how young people navigate memory and community. In order to emphasize that intimacy, I have mostly chosen to use the lower-case ‘other’ throughout the text, as I feel that transforming it into a proper noun through capitalization may have the effect of highlighting the Other as a philosophical construct over the immediacy of the relationship between a specific storyteller and a particular listener.

Following relationality, my understanding of storytelling was informed by a second phenomenological principle, Edmund Husserl’s famous exhortation to “go back to the things themselves.” This is one reason why I do not offer a detailed technical definition of storytelling. Nor did I restrict participants to any one genre or style: they were free to respond to the invitation to tell a story with anything they chose. As a result my definition of storytelling was guided by what they gave me, “the things themselves.” It also built on insights from my previous research on Jewish theological responses to the Nakba, where I saw how easily different forms of storytelling segue into others. At a Passover meal shared by Palestinians and Israelis, personal anecdotes exchanged over food were inscribed into the narrative of persecution, violence, and liberation that we read from the *haggadah* (a liturgical text, literally ‘telling’). Several stories shared by Palestinian guests concerned their experiences of military jail, and so the traditional questioning that takes place during the meal became reminiscent of two other genres, interrogation and testimony. This shifting quality was captured by a group of children at Sumud Story House, who reworked the traditional
story of *Layla and the Wolf* (the Arabic version of *Red Riding Hood*) so that Layla was not prevented from reaching her grandmother by a ravenous wolf, but by the sudden appearance of a vast wall. In doing so, they shared their own experiences of the separation barrier through a metaphor borrowed from a familiar fairy tale, rather than overtly and in the first person. Paradoxically it is a strongly autobiographical tale that lacks autobiography’s typical focus on actual experience of verifiable events.

This study aims to extend the same imaginative freedom to its participants, with a story defined simply by its “possession of narrative connections.” (Carroll 2001:22) Narrative connections create unity through weaving discrete events into a cohesive whole, giving them a discernible sequence. With this awareness of plot structure comes anticipation over what could happen. (Carroll 2001:37) This narrative anticipation is a reminder that every story is shadowed by myriad alternative possibilities (a tacit awareness that takes on new meaning when applied to a project involving hidden histories and intractable political violence, conducted in a region where separation and hostility may be experienced as the status quo). Anticipation also generates attentiveness, a core aspect of the relationship between the teller and the listeners.

The method chosen for eliciting stories was Story Theory (Smith and Liehr 2008), which emphasizes that attentiveness and possibility. Although not explicitly described as phenomenological, Story Theory is clearly indebted to phenomenology. Built on the principles of intentional dialogue, self-in-relation, and creating ease, it aims to build a warm rapport between teller and listener, recognising that this relationship is rich with creative possibilities. Initially developed for use in nursing care settings, it is also sensitive to the vulnerability inherent in the face-to-face relation. I discovered it through the work of Barbara Charbonneau-Dahlen, an American Indian woman investigating the stories of Native people who, like her, had been in mission boarding schools, and whose experiences there lay outside mainstream historical narratives. Establishing the relationship between Story Theory and collective memory, Charbonneau-Dahlen notes that “intentional dialogue may occur when two or more enter into the now, telling of the past, and passing the story to the future for others to dwell upon.” (Charbonneau-Dahlen 2010:3) Vital to the process is “purposeful engagement with another”, during which the listener remains attentive to the teller and, while making no assumptions about the story, seeks to clarify through respectful questioning those points that are obscure or have only partially been uncovered. (Liehr and Smith 2008:230) While intentional dialogue in Story Theory has a concrete objective that is not relevant to my own research (to make sense of health needs and how they affect a person’s daily life), its
conceptualization of storytelling as a journey of discovery for both tellers and listeners and its emphasis on non-judgmental facilitation may be usefully applied here. Participants can be encouraged to help draw out stories both through attentive questioning and sharing stories of their own that add texture to those told by others in the group. Consequently the stories themselves are placed in meaningful dialogue with each other, with new narrative connections forming between them, providing a practical illustration of how community is fostered through storytelling.

The collaboration between the teller and the listeners is emphasized by the principle of self-in-relation. “Self-in-relation is accomplished as the listener and the storyteller engage in such a way as to be totally attuned and aware of self and others in the story.” (Charbonneau-Dahlen 2010:3) This focus on relationships – between tellers and listeners, between listeners and the people (perhaps unknown) who feature in the story, between tellers and the past – lends itself naturally to a research project dealing with young people’s conceptions of community. It encourages awareness of the relationship between participants and the contested spaces in which the stories are unfolding, as well as promoting reflective practice on my part, helping me to remain aware of my own position within each of the communities I entered and the implications that my positioning has for ethnographic research.

Ease is created when, through storytelling, the teller is able to perceive meaning and unity in events and emotions that previously seemed unrelated. “The health challenge becomes part of their life story rather than being perceived as an intruder from the outside with an agenda that is inconceivable, unapproachable, and uncontrollable.” (Charbonneau-Dahlen 2010:4) The setting is also vital to this process. It is important to hold the storytelling sessions in a place where the tellers and listeners are comfortable. Of the three principles underlying Story Theory, this is the most obviously therapeutic: its aim is to reduce anxiety and empower patients with significant health difficulties, which in Charbonneau-Dahlen’s research were affected by historical trauma. As discussed in the literature review, most of the research on storytelling in conflict zones focuses on this therapeutic aspect, aware of the long shadows cast by trauma over successive generations. My own project departs from that. I will document how participants respond to “intruders from the outside” (which could be forbidden histories, or people from the ‘other’ community, or even myself) through their storytelling, without deliberately setting out to alter their current understanding. I recognize, however, that stories offer new perspectives as a result of narrative anticipation; because of storytelling’s very nature, some changes in perspective may occur. It is essential to make participants feel
confident and secure enough to experiment with other vantage points afforded by a story, and to face the ‘What if?’ on which storytelling hinges. (Zipes 1995:37)

Intentional dialogue can inculcate this confidence, especially when it is applied with reference to the work of Paulo Freire, whose understanding of critical consciousness as a co-intentional experience borrows from the phenomenological vocabulary of Edmund Husserl. Dialogue is defined, like storytelling itself, as “an act of creation” in which “people, by naming the world, transform it.” (Freire 1996:69) This co-intentional creative process is not the responsibility of a designated group, but a task open to anyone: “How can I dialogue if I start from the premise that naming the world is the task of an elite and that the presence of the people in history is a sign of deterioration, thus to be avoided?” (Freire 1996:71) This question calls to mind the tension between authorized history as read in textbooks and the “voices from below” (Worby and Ally 2013), as well as being a reminder of the relative powerlessness of children: as the primary consumers of textbooks, they receive readymade histories that leave little room for their own stories and interpretations. By demonstrating to children that their words matter, through active and attentive listening, it is possible to provide the security that they need in order to explore the many differing perspectives and possibilities that a story contains.

In asking, “How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness? Self-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue…” Freire demonstrates the significance of self-in-relation, a profound awareness of other people and what they contribute to the story and its telling. When Story Theory is examined in light of his pedagogy of the oppressed, it becomes more than a therapeutic tool ultimately designed to promote the healing and wellbeing of an individual. It enables participants to look outward as well as inward, conscious of the significance of their individual voices within their broader social and political contexts. Influenced by Freire’s work, the Brazilian dramatist Augusto Boal has devised a wealth of theatrical exercises that give practical expression to Story Theory’s principles. The idea of myriad perspectives is central:

Theatre is born when the human being discovers that it can observe itself; when it discovers that, in this act of seeing, it can see itself – see itself in situ: see itself seeing.

Observing itself, the human being perceives what it is, discovers what it is not, and imagines what it could become. It perceives where it is and where it is not, and imagines where it could go. A triad comes into being. The observing-I, the I-in-situ, and the not-I, that is, the other. (Boal 1995:13)
This act of observation and witnessing, which Boal develops into the idea of spect-actorship, contains echoes of Levinas. (Salverson 2006) To become a witness in the manner described above is “to lose my place radically”, a dangerous act that leaves the witness vulnerable and is vital ethically. (Levinas 1998:185) The characteristics of witnessing described above are not confined to theatre; the imaginative awareness of what is and what might yet be is also essential to any story, a fundamental aspect of narrative connection. In his work with polarized communities fractured by political violence, Boal used theatre to sharpen that awareness among participants, viewing it as essential to liberation. Noting the symmetry between Boal’s approach and Story Theory, I occasionally borrowed from his repertoire of theatre games and adapted them for use as storytelling prompts, which I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as one of the principal analytical frameworks for this project. IPA requires close analysis of detailed transcripts, which is why IPA studies typically involve very small numbers, occasionally restricting themselves to a single interviewee. As I spent sixteen months in Israel/Palestine, interacting with young people on an almost daily basis, it would have been impossible to examine all the stories I gathered in such depth. Instead I opted to use IPA as a microscope, ending my larger-scale group work in each community with a number of in-depth individual interviews that would magnify the stories that had already emerged. In total fourteen interviews were conducted and the transcripts analysed using IPA, while techniques borrowed from ethnographic practice and narrative inquiry more broadly understood were used to interpret the stories I collected in other ways and settings.

Rooted in Husserl’s urge to “go back to the things themselves,” which is echoed by John Collins’s iteration of the need to study narratives as narratives rather than as documentary proof, IPA is interested in “what happens when the everyday flow of lived experience takes on a particular significance for people. This usually occurs when something important has happened in our lives.” (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009:1) The method involves an examination of each person’s lived experience and the significance they assign to it as it emerges through storytelling. Stories are transcribed in detail, with the researcher then reading the transcript several times and using one margin to note key words and phrases, and the other to record the researcher’s own inferences and reactions. Then the researcher begins to cluster these annotations into themes, continually referring back to the text to ensure that this iterative process remains faithful to the source material. Finally the themes are organized into a table, with each theme evidenced by direct quotations from the transcripts. I created a
table for each participant before identifying the themes that emerged in the research as a whole. The master table is available on page 162.

As identified in the preceding chapter, conflict-affected youth are usually imagined and narrated by adults rather than being treated as narrators in their own right. The emphasis on the importance of lived experience makes IPA a particularly interesting method to use here, as it takes for granted the young people’s authority and competence as storytellers. Phenomenology’s simultaneous affirmation of empirical human commonalities and its acceptance of an unfathomable and disturbing alterity also enrich our analysis of young people’s stories, because “access to children – ‘childhood’ – relies on a radical empirical fact: To be human means that one is or once was a child…” This commonality is a springboard into IPA research with youth, whose life-worlds “may not be remembered, or seem quite foreign to adults.” (Danaher and Briod 2005:218) Together with phenomenology’s interest in language and hermeneutics, evident in IPA as a method, this points towards a reconsideration of co-authorship in narrative ethnography.

IPA requires its practitioners to elicit stories that are vivid and detailed enough to exemplify lived experience within a particular sociocultural context. Narrative inquiry would term such stories “thick narratives.” It is broader in scope than IPA, referring to a methodological toolkit rather than any single method. On a collective level, it is interested in the social and political uses of narrative, asking how certain histories and memories are sanctioned while others become forbidden. (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2008) On an individual level, it is concerned with how people structure their stories (not simply with hermeneutics and content). It blends this concern with an enquiring interest in the relationship between stories and the contexts in which they are told, which is also the focus of narrative ethnography. This approach is useful in identifying recurrent motifs and themes (linguistic, stylistic, and structural) that surface in the stories and in relating the themes to their narrative contexts, thereby demonstrating the power that contested spaces can wield over the imagination.

As stories of group members are analysed in relation to each other, it is advisable that groups in an IPA study be fairly homogenous in composition. (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin
2009) All the participant groups in this study meet these criteria, with the possible exception of children from the bilingual village of Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom (who do have the unique experience of integrated living in common). However, the small scale of IPA groups, together with the methodological preoccupations with “rich” or “thick” narratives and what these say about lived experience, raise questions about whether, and in what way, stories may be read as representative of the communities in which they originate. Mindful of the ways in which narrative in Israel/Palestine has been used to cement ethnonational binaries and establish false parity between communities, and the over-concern with documentary evidence that has led stories to be reduced to legal or historical testimony, this project does not claim to provide representative data. Instead, by focusing on communities situated on fault lines – areas of heightened uncertainty – and the stories youth tell there, it invites the reader to focus on uncertainty and its attendant possibilities rather than looking for a definitive understanding of storytelling, community, and memory in any of the field sites.
Field sites and participant recruitment

My research began in Bethlehem, a Palestinian city in the occupied West Bank where I had lived and worked prior to starting my research. Before moving to my own apartment, I lived in a Christian home surrounded on three sides by the separation wall, on a road that had once led from Jerusalem to Hebron but had been abruptly truncated by the barrier’s construction. Checkpoint 300, a military terminal that controls Bethlehemites’ access to Jerusalem, was a two-minute walk from the front door. A watchtower overlooked our driveway and security cameras peered down from the top of the barrier. Only half-jokingly, my host family advised me to be careful to draw the curtains before using the toilet, to avoid featuring in an army surveillance centre. Ironically in light of these privations, Bethlehem lies in Area A, ostensibly under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Under the Oslo Accords, Area A is autonomous, Area B is administered jointly by the Palestinian civil and Israeli military authorities, and Area C (constituting 60% of West Bank territory and the location of most Israeli settlements) is under full Israeli control. All Palestinians living in these non-contiguous areas, spattered across the West Bank like ink in a Rorschach test, are subject to Israeli military law. It is difficult to tell where one area begins and another ends, with the exception of Area A. Roads leading into the PA-administered territory are marked by lurid red trilingual signs: “Warning! Palestinian Authority Area A ahead. Entry for Israeli citizens is strictly forbidden, dangerous to your lives, and illegal under the Israeli law.” When travelling in or out of Bethlehem on Palestinian public transport, I learned to identify a sudden metallic clinking as an indicator that we had crossed an invisible line into Area B or C, where the law on seatbelts is more stringently enforced.

My research in Bethlehem was organized through Sumud Story House, the creative arts and cultural organization where I had once worked; and its partner Al-Rowwad Theatre, a cultural centre operating in the nearby Aida refugee camp. Established as a tented camp in 1948, Aida is now an increasingly cramped urban area wedged against the separation wall, home to approximately 6000 people. Young people were invited to participate through their teachers and youth group leaders at Sumud Story House and Al-Rowwad Theatre. I had soon amassed a core group of about twenty young Palestinians, both Muslim and Christian, who
took part in biweekly storytelling sessions assiduously over the course of nine months. Sometimes they brought friends, and through them I was referred to teenagers living in the nearby Dheisheh refugee camp as well. As I was living in Bethlehem within a short walk of Aida, praying in the Eastern Catholic church that faces the separation barrier, shopping in the same markets, and complaining at the same water cuts, my research here was embedded and ethnographic in the fullest sense. The work I conducted in other communities was qualitatively different even though I employed similar methods for eliciting stories, as I was a visitor rather than a resident.

Gaining access to youth in other communities was more challenging, and gave some insight into spatial understandings of home, safety, and danger in Israel/Palestine. With the help of Palestinian friends living in Hebron and the activist organization Youth against Settlements (YAS), I recruited Palestinian participants from the Old City, the location of several Israeli settlements renowned for the far-right views of their inhabitants and a site of intensified friction and violence marked by heavy military presence. Hebron is one of the more religiously conservative cities of the West Bank, and Hamas enjoys a high level of support among the Palestinian population. My participants were drawn almost exclusively from observant Muslim households, many of them below the poverty line and in receipt of charitable support. When neighbours in Bethlehem realized that I was travelling here on a weekly basis, reactions varied from, “Hebron? How can you go so far on your own!” and “Be careful, be very careful, it’s dangerous there. Not like here.” Hebron is forty minutes from Bethlehem by bus, which I considered a reasonable commute. I was struck by my neighbours’ perception of distance; several friends refused to come with me on the basis that the journey was long. Eventually experience taught me that the sudden appearance of a roadblock could transform a forty-minute journey into a four-hour wait, so my friends were not simply referring to geographical distance when they spoke of Hebron as far. Such distancing techniques are common in other conflict zones, with people continually redrawing what James Thompson terms their mental “threat maps” to ensure that their own locality remains safe, even though outsiders might perceive it as dangerous. (Thompson 2005:142) In Hebron’s Old City, residents operated by different maps: the danger zone was constituted by the checkpoints, houses closest to settlements (which often have cages over their windows to protect the glass from projectiles), and the area around the Cave of the Patriarchs/Ibrahimi Mosque complex, which was the scene of a massacre perpetrated by the settler Baruch Goldstein in 1994 and was subsequently partitioned by the Israeli military. Palestinian
Muslim and Israeli Jewish worshippers pray at the tomb of Abraham from opposite windows, separated by a pane of bulletproof glass.

I had hoped to include Israeli youth from the Old City’s four settlements in the study. Shuhadeh Street/King David Street is a fault line that I wanted to investigate: a segregated road bisecting the city, its Palestinian-owned shop fronts and houses shuttered by military order and punctuated by military watchtowers and buildings requisitioned or built by settlers. Palestinian pedestrians are permitted to walk only on certain sections, and residents who do not have a back door must reach street level by a network of ladders. They know it colloquially as ‘Apartheid Street’ or ‘Ghost Town.’ At the mouth of Shuhadeh Street I would sometimes encounter teenage Israeli girls exchanging Arabic-language obscenities with their Palestinian peers, alternating between swearwords and startlingly sociable questions. Shu ismik? What’s your name? How old are you? Sometimes I got the impression that the swearing was a formality, a prelude to this interaction. When I reported this to a friend in Bethlehem, who is involved in peace and justice work across the West Bank, he laughed. “I’ve seen that. You have to remember they’re growing up together, in a way.”

I wanted to probe the meaning of ‘together’ and ‘in a way.’ The activists from YAS who facilitated my research were cautiously open to this possibility. Issa Amro, one of the founders of YAS, was conflicted: “I want to know how they think, and I don’t consider children to be settlers, but you won’t be able to reach them without going through their schools or their parents, and that legitimizes the settler presence here.” He suggested that I research in different settlements, away from Hebron. I took his advice. On one occasion a soldier in a watchtower, noticing me sitting with a group of children on the roof of their home, had dispatched troops to investigate what we were doing. Moving between Palestinian and settlement houses would have been unusual enough to attract further army notice, which could have had difficult consequences for my Palestinian participants and their families.

Israeli participants in this study were drawn mainly from two groups: families involved in peace and reconciliation projects beyond the Green Line in present-day Israel, such as the peace education group Kids4Peace and the cooperative bilingual village Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom; and settlements in Gush Etzion, which is composed of both religious and secular Jewish communities and constitutes the largest settlement bloc in the West Bank. At first I had hoped to conduct research through the bilingual school network Yad b’Yad [Hand in Hand], as the boundary between Arabic and Hebrew and its implication for storytelling and collective memory had grasped my imagination. Shortly before I approached the Jerusalem school, its first-grade classroom was burned down by activists.
from Lehava, a grassroots anti-miscegenation organization. “No coexistence with cancer” and “Death to Arabs” was scrawled in Hebrew on the walls. The school administration had been inundated with media and research requests and was unable to accommodate me beyond giving me two short tours. The director of Kids4Peace had similar concerns regarding over-research, but as I had been introduced by a friend who had graduated from the program, she invited me to attend the inaugural session for a new cohort. There was a 15-year-old Jewish Yad b’Yad student among the peer facilitators, who happily agreed to take part and to refer any interested classmates to me.

While I worked predominantly through schools and youth groups and under their supervision, snowball sampling did allow me to access communities that initially seemed difficult to reach. This was especially true of settlement communities. As a Hebrew speaker who is not Jewish and who was living in a Palestinian city (I did not want to lie when asked the inevitable, “Where do you live?”) I was met with quizzical courtesy or suspicion when I contacted settlement youth organizations on my own. Eventually I approached an acquaintance in a settlement not far from Bethlehem, explained the difficulties I was facing, and asked for his help. In light of our political disagreements, I was unsure if he would give it. He introduced me into his community, which is largely dati-leumi [religious nationalist], and with his support I was able to make connections there. Contacts in other settlements were established through settlers who are active in different peace groups. While the neighbours of these activists usually disagreed with their politics and viewed them as mavericks, their status as Gush Etzion residents meant they were trusted.

Snowball sampling also gave me an insight into how stories travel and community is formed: one Palestinian boy from Hebron, at the end of an interview conducted in the shadow of a watchtower, unexpectedly offered to put me in touch with young Israelis he had met on Facebook. The process reminded me of Guy Debord’s idea of dérive as described in a fascinating lecture by Carolyn Nordstrom:

It is generally translated as ‘drift’, and is a theoretical and methodological means of uncovering the often hidden or obscured realities defining a city and its people. The technique is to drop all one’s preconceptions and simply to move in a city without a set plan, goal, or direction. The theory is that it will not produce meaningless random chance, but will illuminate the relationships of the public and the invisible, social truths from social fictions, that characterize urban spaces. (Nordstrom 2011:3)

Nordstrom builds on Debord’s concept to demonstrate how histories of violence are evoked through movement in urban space, giving the specific example of a stranger to London’s
growing awareness of the Troubles and their psycho-geography as he moves through the city in a seemingly innocuous search for a litter bin (many bins had been removed as potential bomb locations). However, the idea of drift, although conceived as a way to elucidate processes such as “power, marginalization, resistance, and the art and politics of ‘being’ within a larger phenomenology of the city” (Nordstrom 2011:3), is not bound to urban spaces. Narrative itself is frequently structured around drifts. In the case of the Hebron boy, who had bars on his windows to protect him from settler violence and whose movement was heavily circumscribed by the fact that he was not old enough to be issued an identity card yet old enough to look as though he might require one, the sensation of being “like a chicken in cage” formed his point of narrative departure. He also spoke frequently about social media and how much he liked computing, making it clear that the Internet expanded the social space available to him. This made an encounter with young Israelis possible, a hidden aspect of his life that he could not have brought up earlier: we had arrived at these hidden friendships via bars, cages, checkpoints, and computers. Asking my participants if they knew anyone who might be interested in taking part in my research became part of the storytelling process, a way of gaining some sense of the edges of the young people’s social worlds and the unseen doors that connect them. The result was that I ended up with expressions of interest from the Gaza Strip, an Israeli kibbutz on the Gaza border, and a middle-class town not far from Tel Aviv that seemed most notable for its sleepy anonymity, none of them places that I had identified as potential field sites and yet all part of my participants’ stories in some way. Ultimately I decided that expanding my research too far beyond Bethlehem, Aida refugee camp, Hebron, Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom, and Gush Etzion would make the project unmanageably large, but the doors that opened through the stories I heard in these places are significant in their own right.

I operated with a loose age range of 11 to 18. On consultation with the youth workers and teachers who were involved with recruitment, it was felt that older youth were more likely to benefit from a creative arts project that was aural/oral rather than visual, and issues around consent became more complicated with younger ones. The age range was applied with leeway (occasionally younger siblings and playmates wanted to join in, and recognizing that this was part of the family and community dynamic, I usually accepted) but it served as a general guideline for recruitment.

At first the storytelling sessions were held in cultural and community centres like Al-Rowwad and the YAS house, under the supervision of a youth worker, but then I began to receive invitations from participants’ families to visit their homes and eat with them.
Teenagers in Aida camp and Hebron sometimes took the storytelling sessions into the street, and I judged it important to follow where they led. I was keen to explore the link between the settings they chose for their storytelling and the types of stories that emerged. Young people from Israeli settlements, asked where they felt most comfortable meeting, chose a range of places – a café, a park bench, their homes. This suggested that over time they began to see the research as connected to their private lives, and did not want it to be mediated through institutions such as youth groups.

All participants were recruited with parental consent. I had also prepared consent forms to be signed by the teenagers themselves. The forms, and my request to record the sessions, sometimes worried the Palestinian participants. Discomfort around consent forms and recording equipment among Palestinian informants has been noted by other researchers, stemming from a fear of surveillance by the Israeli military. (Kassem 2009:56; Skinner 2014:183) At first youth in Aida would not allow me to record sessions, but later changed their minds. In Hebron’s Old City the young people were used to meeting journalists (YAS also promotes citizen journalism amongst Hebron youth, using video cameras), so they did not object to the recorder, but were uneasy about giving signatures. Although the university’s ethical guidelines required informed written consent, they also advised cultural sensitivity, so I waived the former policy in recognition of the difficulties of my participants’ situation. Consent was grounded in the young people’s existing acquaintanceship with me or their confidence in the friends who had recommended me to them rather than in a formal contract.

To protect their confidentiality, my voice recorder was password-protected, the data on it encrypted after being uploaded to my computer, and all participants assigned pseudonyms. In cases where participants declined to be recorded, I took minimal notes during the storytelling itself, preferring to give the tellers my full attention. I wrote down their stories from memory as soon as the session ended. All participants were made aware of their right to retract data from the study. Interestingly, while none of them did this, occasionally a young person began a story with, “Just listen to this one, don’t write about it…”

Many young people were curious about the children from other communities who were taking part in the study, and would ask what kind of stories I was hearing. Sometimes the questions were baldly put. “Do you know any terrorists?” “I bet they tell you they can’t wait to go to the army and come to kill us.” One 18-year-old girl from Gush Etzion asked if I knew any Palestinians who would be interested in being her penfriend. For both ethical and methodological reasons, I did not attempt to conduct joint storytelling sessions with participants from multiple field sites. My objective was to gain an understanding of how
young people make sense of memory through story, and its implications for their existing ideas of community and belonging. They live in a situation of hafrada [segregation], and bringing them into an artificial (and temporary) ‘mixed’ setting could only have resulted in artificial stories. Such research also risks normalizing an abnormal situation, papering over the inequalities and injustices that split Israelis from Palestinians in its implicit suggestion that a joint storytelling session represents a level plane. I also felt that to forward contact between participants from different communities would have been irresponsible, as I could not predict the outcome. I had the ability to board a plane and leave the situation behind; my participants would have no such option if my fieldwork caused problems for them.

**Knowing my place: thoughts on positionality**

My freedom of movement raises questions about my position as an international researcher, as it is one of the main things differentiating me from the youth with whom I worked. Palestinian movement is severely circumscribed under military law, while Israelis are prohibited from entering major Palestinian population centres in Area A. Even within the Green Line, Jewish and Arab citizens lead broadly segregated lives; and by virtue of their age, young people often face greater limitations on their movement than adults. I could recruit participants from so many sub-communities only because my own movement between these places was not legally restricted, and as a member of neither ethnonational group, I do not share the same fears or risks. I was open with all the young people about where I was working and where I lived, and although I sought to avoid being drawn into detailed conversations about my own life (for example, when asked by Israeli teenagers if Bethlehem is frightening, I would respond, “I can tell you about my experience there later, but for now I’d like to hear what you think. What do you imagine it’s like?”), it became clear that many young people treated our meetings as a window into another place, a chance to catch glimpses into things they had often wondered about but never been able to see.

Almost all of them appeared to take it for granted that if they told stories to me, I would reciprocate. When working with young Palestinians in Hebron and Aida this was explicitly voiced at the end of many sessions: “Now you tell us a story.” My youngest informants were the most insistent, suggesting that they were used to being entertained by adults through stories, and also that they regarded our meetings as dialogues or a transaction rather than as an interview. Older youth displayed a similar understanding: at the end of each meeting, they would ask questions to elicit my own stories: why had I come to their country? Why was I interested in them? What was I discovering? I was reminded of the trope of the
strange traveller, common in European and Middle Eastern folklore, who repays hospitality by telling stories. I took this responsibility seriously, recognizing that storytelling is a two-way encounter; even when I perform stories from a stage, I do not speak into a void but try to develop some sense of who my listeners are. I only told a story of my own at the end of the sessions, so that my own words did not dominate the meeting, and first I asked the young people what sort of story they wanted. The replies gave me insight into the stories they themselves had told.

As I considered the transmission of stories across boundaries, it occurred to me that whether consciously or otherwise, in their choice of material the youth were responding to the idea of the wandering storyteller and stories as uncharted foreign spaces – a trope that was reinforced by my visible ‘outsider’ status. Having conducted interviews in Israel/Palestine for my Master’s degree, I noticed that participants in my doctoral research were far more spontaneous and engaged; and it may be that a psycho-literary conflation of the storyteller with the stranger made the young people feel at home in the project. My strange-ness was an expected part of the story.

Although there were similarities in how I was received from community to community, there were important differences. My research grew out of prior work in Bethlehem, where I had numerous friends and was known to have a strong interest in children’s rights, which continued to find expression during my fieldwork: I gave a series creative arts workshops in the deprived and chronically underfunded Jerusalem school where a friend teaches, supported legal campaigns on behalf of minors in military custody, and visited people whose homes had been demolished or were under threat. Along with friends from my church in Bethlehem, I participated in activities organized by Sabeel and Kairos Palestine, Christian groups that are developing of a theology of liberation through acts of practical solidarity. I was able to recruit Palestinian participants through a strong network of friends and acquaintances to whom my politics were known, and several of the young people who took part in the project already recognized me by sight. While I often met Israeli young people with the assistance of Israeli friends, I came to them as a visitor rather than as a person with the same day-to-day involvement in their community life, and perhaps because of this, their initial motivation for participating was different. “I want to defend my country” and “I want to talk for my country” were commonly voiced sentiments. This implied that at first they saw me as a combination of judge and journalist, with the power to help them confront an unseen partisan audience. It may be that Palestinian youth also approached the project
with these defensive patriotic aims, but because they saw me as a political ally, they felt no need to stress them.

At first I was afraid that my commitment to justice for Palestine might prevent me from doing full justice to the stories told by Israeli youth – was the army really so prominent in their storytelling, for example, or was it just one strand that happened to be vivid to me, given that I lived at the foot of a watchtower? I remained alert to these questions, especially when transcribing stories and noting the emerging themes. Further questions were sparked by my personal life. My then-partner, a secular Jewish Israeli who had a strong antipathy to the right-wing religious community and viewed it as responsible for the occupation’s perpetuation, was supportive of my decision to research in settlements but reacted angrily to the conclusions I was drawing. He would sometimes refer to settlement youth as ‘kids’, using inverted commas to emphasize that he did not perceive them as children (with the associated childhood innocence) but as colonizers. His hostility led me to feel very protective towards this participant group, and although I never spoke to any of the young people about friction in my personal life, this may have communicated itself to them – growing up in a polarized and segregated society, they were aware of the costs that my project might have. One 12-year-old boy phrased it bluntly: “Some people will hate you just for talking to us.”

His dispassionate reference to hatred illuminates a significant personal challenge. As a practising Catholic, surrounded by material reminders of the stories of Jesus, the most pressing methodological question I grappled with in Israel/Palestine was how to research lovingly. Love for all my participants and their families, and the idea of such love as being crucial to project’s success, may seem awkwardly personal and embarrassingly unscientific. However, in a place where hatred is presented as the consequence of “just talking”, it seems logical to me that a researcher who expects people to talk must share responsibility for the climate that talking creates. I was very conscious of the injunctions to listen that recur across Abrahamic sacred texts, especially in the prayer recited by observant Jews morning and evening: “Shma…” (Hear…), and I recognized that being an attentive listener is crucial to Christian love for neighbour, to solidarity with the oppressed, and to the quality of ethnographic research. I carried out this project with a strong conviction that all young people have important stories, and my greatest fear was that I might not be listening astutely enough.

Hearing stories in Bethlehem and Hebron, for example, I was able to visualize the places that young people spoke about. A mention of a certain street would bring its image to my mind, a story about an army incursion or killing would remind me of what I myself had been doing on that day. The tellers and I shared a set of spatial and temporal landmarks.
When listening to Israeli youth, especially those in settlements, I frequently had limited personal knowledge of the places and events they narrated. This meant that I related to their stories in a different way, such as asking for more detail rather than unconsciously allowing my imagination to supply it. Sometimes I felt ignorant and I was embarrassed to show it, feeling that as a researcher I ought to be displaying expertise and that the young people might be put off by poor knowledge of their daily lives. Drawing on another concept from my religious practice – humility – enabled me to challenge this misplaced belief, and the young people responded to my more basic questions with enthusiasm. In one group meeting, a 15-year-old girl commented, “It’s good that you ask us all this. Chilonim [secular Israelis] think they know everything. They think I live on a hill with a long skirt and a caravan.” There was laughter and agreement.

Intriguingly, although all the participants knew that I was non-Israeli and non-Jewish, the girl’s remark implied that she was still classing me with chilonim. Her perception of me provides valuable insight into how she organizes and narrates her social world. I also noticed that Palestinian youth with Israeli citizenship would frequently address me in Hebrew, suggesting that on some level they associated me with Jewish Israelis. On one occasion I overheard a boy in Aida replying, “Here” to a stranger who was asking him where I lived. Although the young people knew that I was from England, they almost all appeared to be trying to place me somewhere on a local map.

As the months passed, I became aware of how my research – itself a story – was influencing my own understanding of community in contested space. I would sometimes meet Israeli and Palestinian adults who were excited by my research and would ask loaded questions about ‘brainwashing’ and ‘cultures of hatred’, apparently hoping that my work with youth would support their own view of the other community. I saw this as dehumanizing treatment of the young people, an attempt to reduce them to pawns or puppets without any regard for what they had to say, which angered me. Reflecting on this anger, I noticed that I had begun to see all ‘my participants’ as part of their own distinct community (perhaps inevitably, as I could not help hearing each story in relation to the others, as polyphony). Listening to one young person and consciously struggling to be faithful to their experience in what I wrote became an act of solidarity with them all.

My writing was informed by this sense of the storytellers as constituting a distinct community. I would often move from Gush Etzion in the morning to Aida refugee camp in the afternoon without a break but always with a sudden wrenching dislocation as I passed from comparative affluence to poverty. Stories are presented to next to one another in
disturbing juxtaposition, in a reflection of both the physical landscape and how they were gathered. I was simultaneously aware of all my participants and their physical proximity, whilst feeling as if though I had made a long journey instead of going five miles down the road. By moving back and forth between these places throughout my writing, instead of devoting a separate chapter to each field site, I give primacy to the themes that emerged through the storytelling rather than forcing the stories to conform to Israel/Palestine’s physical geography. I also hope that the reader will experience something of that dislocation and attendant discomfort, not only because it makes the fault lines that cross this study so painfully clear, but because the stark contrast raises questions about the human and civil rights of the young people who inhabit them.

Although I am politically active, I have shied away from calling myself an activist or viewing this work in terms of witness. Volunteers tend to stay in the Occupied Territories for such a short period (Israeli tourist visas are issued for three months and are notoriously difficult to renew) that sightseeing or conflict tourism might be a more accurate descriptor than witnessing; and the idea of the international witness is fraught for many reasons. Firstly, it suggests an official role and is imbued with notions of credibility and power (Ben-Ze’ev 2011:99), implying that Israel/Palestine’s inhabitants gain legitimacy if their stories are mediated through a third person. Secondly, it can segue into voyeurism. There were occasions in Palestine when I literally turned my back: when a friend from Gaza cried after waking from a nightmare of Operation Cast Lead, I left the room so that she might wash her face in privacy. At a Kairos Palestine conference in Bethlehem, we saw a video of schoolgirls in Gaza who mutinied on screen, angrily refusing to tell their stories for the sake of these foreigners because they felt that witness (ours and theirs) would achieve nothing. One girl, reluctantly prodded into speech, turned her own eloquent back to the camera. Aware of the limitations of witnessing, the false idea that all pain must be seen and told, I did my best to respect the silences that emerged in the young people’s stories. When one teenager described violence that had led her to the point of attempting suicide, I chose not to include that raw personal story, and went back to her months later to check that leaving it out had been the right decision. Yes, came the reply. I had listened to her stories closely enough to realize that this was something she might regret placing in the public domain, even anonymously; and this illustrates how I have tried to position myself throughout the project – not as a witness, but as a listener.

Practical aspects of story-based fieldwork
Out there things can happen, and frequently do,
To people as brainy and footsy as you.
When things start to happen, don’t worry, don’t stew,
Just go right along, you’ll start happening too!
Dr Seuss, *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!*

Inspired by Jack Zipes’s idea of an anti-manual for storytelling (Zipes 1995), I did not arrive in Israel/Palestine with a detailed schedule of interview questions or storytelling activities. I had a repertoire of games and activities culled from theatre (particularly social theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed), creative writing, and ethnographic participatory research, which I would adapt or reinvent according to the needs of the situation. I also carried a selection of basic props, such as Story Cubes (pictorial dice that can be used as a stimulus for storytelling – the challenge is to weave a story around the pictures that roll up) and playing cards carrying questions, opening sentences, and other story prompts. Too much planning would have been counterproductive, as thanks to the volatility of the environment, creative arts practitioners working in situations of political violence have to be unusually quick-thinking and responsive – a quality summed up by the Dr Seuss snippet that hung on my wall in Bethlehem, which captures my methodological approach.

This is illustrated by something that happened on Tuesday 24 February 2015. Walking through central Bethlehem at approximately ten o’clock in the morning, I noticed that all the shops were shuttered, even on Manger Square, and knew that there had been an army killing. The sight of a crowd straggling up from Beit Jala Hospital as I came down Madbasseh Street confirmed it. Later that day the teenagers in Aida told me the victim had been a twenty-year-old student from Dheisheh refugee camp, and he had been shot as he threw stones at Israeli troops. The teenagers were uninterested in the storytelling games I had prepared; they led me to a memorial in the camp, a stretch of wall covered in chalky names and decorated with a border of tanks, and one girl explained, “These are the people who died in Gaza last summer, the children and the ones our age.” Recognizing that they would not sit indoors today, I conducted the session on the street, improvising a new activity: each person chose to face either the memorial or the separation barrier and took it in turns to tell the dead youth, the unseen soldiers, or the walls themselves a story. Borrowing from Forum Theatre, the teenagers were invited to step up to the storyteller and replace her if they felt inspired by something she had said. Interestingly, without instruction from me, they modified the activity further: they began recalling previous storytellers to the front. The session ended when a distant gate in the separation barrier rumbled open and soldiers emerged, equipped with riot
gear, evidently anticipating protests. A teenager who had addressed her story to the army and concluded it with, “When will you go away?” quipped, “It’s like they heard me!”

This is a successful example of a storytelling activity that was developed quickly in response to an unexpected change in situation. Other activities were less successful. I frequently used a form of participatory mapping, finding that young people enjoyed creating a map featuring all the places and people that were most significant to them, organized in whatever way they chose (not necessarily as a precise geographical representation), and telling stories based on the maps. This activity was a disaster in Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom. The teenagers were listless and bored as they drew. When I invited them to narrate their maps to me, their replies were flat, almost monosyllabic. One girl walked out. An older boy kept glancing at his watch. Worrying that they had been corralled into participation by the youth group leader, I pressed on, hoping that an activity that had generated so much enthusiasm in other places would eventually kindle some interest if I took a more directive approach. “Now I want you to draw a place where you can’t go.” “I don’t know what to draw,” one girl muttered in Arabic, and her friend replied, “Oh, put Gaza or Lebanon or somewhere. That’s what she wants.” Catching this, I intervened. “What do you mean?” At last everyone was looking at me. “I mean you researchers come here all the time,” the girl replied, sounding half-accusatory, half-apologetic, “and you all want the same things.” We tore up the maps, and I asked them to tell me what they thought of researchers. This session, while outwardly a failure, marked the beginning of a collaboration: I requested them to help me design my work with them from the beginning. They wanted to meet with me individually rather than as a group, and I returned to the village next week feeling that by sounding out their frustrations, I had at least established a degree of trust.

This anecdote raises the question of over-research, which is a significant issue in Israeli and Palestinian communities. A study of over-research in Shatila refugee camp found that residents believed they were being exploited for researchers’ own gain, that their practical needs and political rights were being disregarded in favour of culling stories, that researchers had objectives that clashed with the residents’ own priorities, and that participatory research in particular was repetitive and dull. Some residents suggested that research involving children was especially damaging, as children who had been lavished with attention and presents felt discarded when researchers left the camp and failed to keep in touch. (Sukarieh and Tannock 2013) I began to grasp the scale of the problem when I approached a secular Jewish Israeli school where I had personal contacts, located in a nondescript town that seemed to be of no special social or political interest. The principal
replied apologetically that to avoid disrupting the students she had decided to host only one international researcher per year, and that year’s research had already been done – would I be interested in returning in twelve months? While I was unsurprised to learn that Yad b’Yad had been inundated with research requests, the discovery that an unremarkable school in an unremarkable suburb had had to set a quota on foreign researchers was startling.

This prompted me to ensure that the project benefited participants in some tangible way. At the outset, I asked teachers and youth workers to identify particular needs in their community, and we discussed how my research could help. In Aida refugee camp, storytelling sessions were incorporated into the after-school homework club run by Al-Rowwad. The teachers found that when I had taken young people aside they were able to devote more attention to struggling younger pupils. They saw my project as a creative learning opportunity, which they were pleased to be able to offer as part of their own program. At the staff’s request I ended up working in Aida for over a year. In one Israeli settlement my research was viewed as an opportunity for youth to practise their English, so I agreed to conduct some English-language sessions. By remaining responsive to community needs and offering young people the opportunity to shape the project, I was able to mitigate but not eradicate the risks of over-research. Making sure that the activities were genuinely fun was also part of this. A Palestinian mother in Hebron asked me sardonically, “And if my children tell you their stories, what will change? What will happen?” I told her that I hoped they would enjoy their afternoon. I realized too late that this could have been interpreted as facetious, but the mother laughed and gave her consent. People also seemed to find my knowledge of Hebrew and Arabic important; it was frequently commented on as an inducement to participate, even among teenagers with a high level of English. My willingness to learn their languages proved to be more significant than my proficiency in recruiting participants.

The multilingual nature of this project raised questions around translation, especially as storytelling sessions frequently moved between languages and code-switching was common among bilingual youth. As transcription is time-consuming and the quality of my written Hebrew and Arabic is weaker than my speech, I opted to transcribe in English directly from the recordings, noting the dominant language of each session. To indicate code-switching in the stories, I give the transliterated Hebrew or Arabic phrase and its translation in square brackets. As IPA calls for such close attention to linguistic features as well as content, I was sensitive to the fact that the register of the storytelling sessions differed with the language being used, and that this may have influenced how stories were told. I studied
Hebrew as part of an MA in Jewish Studies and then enrolled in an advanced ulpan [language school], while I acquired spoken Palestinian Arabic through my previous work in Bethlehem, becoming proficient in local slang with the aid of my teenage tutors. The Hebrew taught in ulpan is formal and old-fashioned. Israeli participants were frequently amused by my use of archaisms, while Palestinians seemed less conscious that I was communicating in my second language, with the mother of one child asking if I were Lebanese. Aware that I struggle to detect more subtle changes in register, having studied literary Hebrew and colloquial Arabic respectively, I asked native speakers who had chaperoned group sessions to check that I had not given overly formal or colloquial translations. This enabled me to examine the relationship between the language and the content of the stories in closer detail.

**Scope and challenges of the study**

These communities I worked within cannot be treated as representative of the colourful ethnic, religious, and political patchwork that makes up Israeli and Palestinian society, so the results of the research may not be generalized to other subgroups within the population. While a limitation in one sense, this is also a strength: the stories that emerged can be read as a reminder of the value to be found in minority experience and as a warning against trying to read a hegemonic understanding into a society’s approach to its past. The composition of my research groups reflects this implicit message. However, in focusing on different pieces of the mosaic the study does convey a sense of the whole; and by describing ways in which stories are either halted or transmitted at specific boundaries that may be found in almost all societies affected by intractable political violence, the work may have resonance outside Palestine/Israel. This process of transmission is a major focus of my research and is quite unaffected by questions of statistical representativeness.

A second challenge arose from the participatory nature of the research, which for me should not refer simply to data collection methods, but to how the data is presented. Many participants spoke no English, and the specialist theoretical language of academia would be too difficult even for those who are proficient. Conscious of how language and narrative play into the politics of exclusion that predominate in Israel/Palestine, I did not want to ‘translate’ their stories into a language unrecognizable to them, alienating them from their own words and life experiences. Although the literature review and methodology chapters necessitated a more technical style and a demonstration of theoretical knowledge, when I reached the main body of the thesis it was important for me that my writing style should be lucid, accessible to non-specialist audiences, and easy to translate into Hebrew or Arabic. This has meant
foregrounding the youth’s own words over secondary literature, in keeping with IPA as a method, and avoiding abstruse terminology. I view this as another attempt to create vocabularies that reward and reinforce acts of peace and justice.

Thinking about what language to use brought me into confrontation with my own position as ethnographer and storyteller, and the political perspectives I hold. A few weeks before my research ended, I watched soldiers removing two young Palestinian boys from a bus because they had no identity cards. The boys’ parents pleaded with the soldiers to remember that the military authorities do not issue paperwork before children turn sixteen and that the boys had no ID to produce. My seat was by the door and as the boys waited to exit the bus I saw that one of them was fighting to restrain tears. Jolted into speech, I exclaimed in Hebrew, “What’s this, what are you doing, this is ridiculous.” A soldier stopped by my seat, the metal of his gun inches from my face. “Why are you getting involved?” The bus was silent. I had no idea how to reply. I only knew that in such a situation I could not have simply taken notes. My research journey contained numerous similar dilemmas, which are captured by Ruth Behar’s work on anthropology and its relationship to what she names as heartbreak:

Loss, mourning, the desire for memory, the desire to enter into the world around you and having no idea how to do it, the fear of observing too coldly or too distractedly or too raggedly, the rage of cowardice, the insight that is always arriving late, as defiant hindsight, a sense of the utter uselessness of writing anything and yet a burning desire to write something, are the stopping places along the way. (Behar 1997:3)

The door of the bus hissed open and the boys stepped out into an oblong of white sunlight, followed by the soldiers and then the parents. Before I could think of what more to say, the door had shut. During my research I witnessed stories through many doorways and from extremely different vantage points, but this one retains a clarity and poignancy in my memory. This affected my work. Given that “the terminology of peace and conflict and academic analyses based on them are never wholly neutral or automatically independent” (de Jong 2012:200), I have never attempted to take a neutral position politically. The adoption of apparently impartial binary terms (e.g. ‘Palestinian-Israeli conflict’) in pursuit of academic neutrality “distorts unequal power relations and ignores the lived experience of violence” (de Jong 2012:193), becoming a politically charged decision in its own right: as there can be no impartial position to take, my concerns about researcher bias do not relate to political neutrality. The risk lay rather in my approach to data gathering and the understanding I brought to the analysis. As I had had limited interaction with Israeli settlers before I began
my research, and even less with settlers who possess a strong dati-leumi outlook, I found that my skills as a facilitator were stunted by my lack of community-specific knowledge and my worry that I might upset the young people by asking questions they experienced as accusatory. I was more confident in broaching potentially controversial topics with Palestinians in Bethlehem and Aida, as I felt they knew me well enough to realize that I was not doing so out of hostility or a wish to provoke. After a meeting with settlement youth whose awkwardness and polite reserve mirrored my own, I jotted in my reflective diary, “I will have to trust them to trust me.” Once I became more frank in my approach, the young people became more engaged and spontaneous in interaction, and their stories became progressively more detailed.

With all my participants, but especially with this community, I reduced the impact of researcher bias by being open about my lack of knowledge about their worlds, making as few assumptions as possible, and being observant and curious about the assumptions I did make. At the end of one of my final interviews, with a seventeen-year-old resident of Gush Etzion, I asked my usual closing question: “Is there anything else you’d like to say?” He grinned, and did a realistic impersonation of me listening to him, cupping his face in one hand, looking away, and muttering, “Hmm.” Then he said, “Remember that you don’t know everything.” Along with Dr Seuss’s advice on how to act ‘out there’, this encompasses my approach to the stories I gathered and how I read them now.
The personal and political significance of language in Palestine/Israel is encapsulated by a story told by Rana, a 14-year-old girl from Bethlehem. As her family waited at a military checkpoint, a soldier asked her father for their surname. “He told the soldier ‘Lama’. The soldier asked for our name again, so my father kept saying ‘Lama’. The soldier got angry and started shouting.” Eventually it registered with Rana that in addition to being a Palestinian surname, *lama* is the Hebrew word for why. “A good question at these checkpoints,” she concluded. The unintentional pun and its challenge to the soldier’s authority provides a vivid snapshot of both the power dynamics that exist in the occupied West Bank and language’s subversive potential.

Living in Bethlehem and making frequent journeys across the geopolitical boundaries that crisscross Israel/Palestine, marked by checkpoints and roadblocks, I became acutely aware of these sociolinguistic aspects of conflict and what they convey about processes of inclusion, exclusion, and “imagining community.” (Anderson 1983) Road signs with Arabic place names scrawled out by right-wing Israeli activists are a common sight; in some areas Palestinian communities are not signposted. Walking through Sheikh Jarrah, a neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, my eyes would be drawn to a street sign affixed to a former Palestinian home that is now occupied by Jewish settlers. The Arabic name has been obscured with an ominous bilingual sticker produced by the anti-miscegenation organization Lehava, which reads, “Don’t you even think about a Jewish woman!” But the rest of the street is inhabited by Palestinians and the settler family will hear Arabic floating through the windows at any given hour, a seeming incongruity that fascinates me: in blotting out the road’s Arabic name, is it possible to mentally blot out its occupants, evidently imagined as rapacious males? Does language serve as a way to challenge or obscure the local landscape, allowing settlers to construct an alternative community that excludes their immediate neighbours?

These questions intensified during a checkpoint crossing of my own, when a Druze soldier insulted the bus driver in Hebrew: “You Arabs…” It was late evening and the bus was almost empty. Sitting near the front, I had a clear view of what occurred as the driver replied in Arabic, “Oh sweetheart, you’re Arab too. Just ask those Jews you’re with what you are.” The soldier seized the driver by the neck and began to shake him, switching from Hebrew to fluent Arabic. I realized that the strength of the riposte did not lie simply in the driver’s statement of affinity with the soldier and his insinuation that they share subordinate status, but in his use of Arabic, which is also the native language of Israel’s Druze communities. By
refusing to reply in Hebrew, the driver pulled the soldier onto thorny common ground, causing the parameters of community to shift dramatically – “you Arabs” became “we Arabs.” As I went about daily life, shopping in the markets and chatting to bus passengers, I started to take note of the less spectacular shifts. The most obvious was unconscious code-switching on isolated words, occurring even in communities that view linguistic purity as a sign of ethno-nationalist commitment and revealing the extent to which Hebrew and Arabic have cross-fertilized each other. Does this cross-fertilization influence how people imagine their communities and narrate their histories, even if it is not openly acknowledged or recognized? Code-switching hints at a politically charged and frequently taboo subject, intimate coexistence versus a peace achieved through separation, demonstrating the way that forbidden histories and possibilities are encoded in language’s DNA.

This chapter sets out to explore these issues with regard to youth in Israel/Palestine, analysing the function of language in their storytelling and what lexical choice, use of metaphor, and perception of the ‘other’ language have to say about how they imagine community – particularly the political no-go zones and the social grey areas, the hidden landscapes. I use ‘hidden landscape’ to refer to places that may be beyond a young person’s sight or first-hand knowledge, as the sea is for some of the Palestinians in this study; but also for landscapes that are rendered invisible, as Palestinian presence is by the absence or vandalism of Arabic road signs. With reference to the Lacanian theory that the unconscious is structured like a language, the chapter considers the vocabulary of symbol and metaphor that young people from the different participant groups have developed in narrating unseen spaces, discussing what these distinctive figurative vocabularies reveal about their encounters with the other, and the place that other holds in their understanding of community. It pays particular attention to the cultural lexicon that young people are likely to draw upon in their stories, namely fairy tale and folk heritage – firstly in recognition of fairy tale’s intimate relationship with oral storytelling and its role in how community is imagined (Zipes 1995), and secondly because of fairy tale’s capacity to ignite imaginative engagement with the traumatic and taboo pasts that are an indelible part of every hidden landscape.

Fairy tale as an idiom of terror
The relationship between fairy tale and children’s imaginative responses to political terror is vividly apparent in literature surrounding Holocaust memoir and memory. A psychotherapist working with survivor families characterized parents’ Holocaust narratives as “gruesome stories in which Hansel and Gretel were really pushed into the oven” (Freyberg 1989:95),
drawing a direct parallel between traumatic family history and the fairy tales that comprise most children’s basic literary diet. This parallel becomes even more explicit in the writing of Eva Hoffman, a Holocaust historian and the daughter of Polish Jewish survivors:

[T]he hypervivid moments summoned by my parents registered themselves as half awful reality, half wondrous fairy tale. A peasant’s hut, holding the riddle of life or death; a snowy forest, which confounds the sense and sense of direction. A hayloft in which one sits, awaiting fate, while a stranger downstairs, who is really a good fairy in disguise, is fending off that fate by muttering invocations under her breath and bringing to the hiding place a bowl of soup. The sister, young, innocent, and loved, standing naked above a pit that is soon to become her own mass grave… (Hoffman 2005:11-12)

This dark-forested landscape, populated by monsters and teeming with unseen dangers, is borrowed from Eastern European folk culture. In using these motifs to tell the story of her parents’ wartime experiences, Eva Hoffman added the Nazi death camps and killing groves to an imaginative mental map that also contained witches’ cauldrons and Baba Yaga’s cottage. The carefully maintained silence in Hoffman’s home meant that this figurative language was the only means of discussing the Holocaust that was available to her:

It was true of my parents, as it was of many survivors, that they did not talk much about their prewar lives…The six years of the war had created a geological fissure in time and removed the world before to another era. There was nothing to help me imagine time extending backwards. The cut reinforced the conviction that the war, the Holocaust, was the dark root from which the world sprang. (Hoffman 2005:13)

This sense of dislocation from time, common in trauma narratives (Terr 1984; Brison 1999), makes fairy tale an ideal medium for exploring intergenerational legacies of terror and trauma. Fairy tales are typically devoid of temporal ‘landmarks’ such as dates; in this sense they are themselves dislocated from time. (Haase 2000) Consequently the stories that Hoffman pieced together from the fragments that her parents dropped, and which seemed to hold the potency of a creation myth, can only find a home in the genre that opens with the classically vague “once upon a time”. Equally important is the ambiguity of space in fairy tale, which is peppered with places ranging from the mundane to the fabulous that recall real life without resorting to ‘real’ place names, thereby liberating fairy tale from the constraints of physical geography. Through this process the Poland of the Shoah became accessible to an emigrant child growing up in Canada:

Towers, forests, rooms, cages, ovens, huts, and enchanted castles are typical locations that threaten characters with isolation, danger, and violence, including imprisonment
and death. Even familiar locations – including home – can become defamiliarized and threatening, as in ‘Hansel and Gretel’…It seems evident that the fairy tale’s geography and ambiguous landscapes lend themselves well to mapping the actual experience of physical dislocation and disorientation brought on by war. (Haase 2000:363-364)

The stylistic features of fairy tale make it an apt vehicle for forbidden history, partly due to its ability to convey the trauma-induced sense of temporal and spatial dislocation which is so frequently a component of such histories, but also because it furnishes us with a coded language of symbol and metaphor that is nonetheless widely understood. Children growing up in survivor homes may have been unable to talk directly about Birkenau ovens, but a witch’s oven could be substituted for these, enabling them to reassemble their parents’ ‘hidden landscape’ using everyday cultural tropes and figures that they had harvested from fairy tale and folk heritage. Most research into this storytelling process is informed by psychoanalytic approaches to literature and preoccupied with fairy tale’s potential as “an emotional survival strategy” (Haase 2000:361), a trend initiated through Bruno Bettelheim’s work on fairy tale and trauma. (Bettelheim 1976) In his study of children’s literature of atrocity, which dwells heavily on fairy tale forms, Kenneth Kidd argues that Holocaust writing in particular “would be unthinkable without the therapeutic ethos” that was midwifed by the popularity of psychoanalysis in the decades after the Shoah. (Kidd 2005:162) The socio-political possibilities of fairy tale in narrating forbidden histories are rarely discussed, especially in relation to children’s storytelling. Yet a sociolinguistic analysis of stories told by young people who live with the legacy (and the ongoing reality) of political terror reveals clear political functions.

These functions result from the child’s position as “ratified non-participant.” (Goffman 1981:9) The concept is taken further in Ruth Wajnryb’s applied linguistic study of the transmission of Holocaust narratives in survivor homes:

What happens here is that the child who is the listener moves from a clearly public role (listener) into a less public role (eavesdropper). As such, the listener is still ‘ratified’ – meaning their presence is known about, as distinct from say, a child hiding and overhearing – but the difference is that the eavesdropping child is allowed to be a non-participant. Being a ratified non-participant is a luxurious role in that one is able to take information in receptively but is relieved of the obligations of fully-fledged listeners, namely having to produce responses and exhibit overt, active listening behaviours. (Wajnryb 2009:239)

However, in characterizing the ratified eavesdropper’s role as a passive one, Wajnryb does not take the concept far enough. In fairy tale and folklore, eavesdropping blurs into narrative
omniscience, giving narrative power to the covert listeners. Eavesdropping also makes demands on children’s ingenuity and creativity: having overheard their parents’ midnight plans to abandon them in the heart of the forest, Hansel and Gretel lay trails of breadcrumbs and white pebbles to enable them to find their way home. The forbidden family histories that youth receive as “humble, homely, disconnected units of narration” (Hoffman 2005:12), which trickle through bedroom walls or are told to visitors while the young people recede into the wallpaper, invite a similar creative response. Through the familiar structure and rich figurative vocabulary of fairy tales, youth are able to organize those disconnected units into a coherent form, a process that is essential not only to psychological healing (Amir et al 1998) but also to community-building. (Zipes 1995) Through the stories that they weave around the significant histories that are rarely directly broaching with them, children become archivists and architects of community, two obviously socio-political functions.

An explicit example that I discovered in the course of my own research was a fairy tale created by a group of twelve young people living in Bethlehem, in proximity to the separation wall. They worked on this story as a group, writing it out and illustrating it in detail before narrating it, taking it in turns to voice the characters:

Once upon a time there was a little girl who brought food to her grandma every day…Her grandmother loved her so much that she made her a flowery dress. The little girl found it so pretty that she wore it every day, and everyone called her Warda [Rose].

That morning her mother had cooked rice and chicken. “Take this to your grandmother. Be careful!” Warda left at once. But that day she found her path barred by this huge wall. She sat and cried. A boy from school asked why she was crying. Warda told him, “I need to get to my grandmother but I can’t get through any more.”

“Why don’t you throw stones to break the wall?” he suggested. Warda threw one stone, she threw two, but the wall stayed up. After the third stone she began to cry again. The woodcutter came by and said, “What are you doing, Warda?” She said, “I want to go to my grandmother.”

“That won’t work, let me help you,” the woodcutter said. He chopped down a big tree so that it fell against the wall. Warda thanked him and climbed up the tree, but the wall was still too high. She couldn’t go down the other side.

Then an old man asked, “What are you doing up there?”

“I want to go my grandmother. She lives on the other side.”

“Let me help you.”

The old man gave Warda a pencil. “This pencil is very special. Draw what you dream of. You’ll see.”

Warda drew a huge bird on the wall. And soon, it came alive. Warda jumped on its back with her basket… “Good morning, Grandma, look what I brought you!”

This contemporary reworking of Layla and the Wolf (an Arabic version of Red Riding Hood) contains many themes. Immediately obvious is the young people’s own distress at having
their movement restricted and contact with near relatives made more difficult – something that is also present in stories about the wall that I heard from Bethlehem adults. The elderly relative of one participant reported, “Everywhere I look I see the wall. I feel as though the wall is on my heart.” This sense of claustrophobia permeates the story (in their oral telling, the tellers spontaneously added several times that Warda was ‘stuck’ and ‘crying’) but cannot close it down; due to the narrative familiarity offered by the fairy tale form both tellers and listeners know that Warda will eventually outwit the wall/wolf. However, this fairy tale account of the construction of the barrier (which was built so rapidly in Bethlehem that youth in some neighbourhoods returned home from school to find that it had sprung up in their absence, in a seemingly fantastical manner) is not simply a psychological exercise in wish fulfilment, but a demonstration of young people’s sense of responsibility to their community. Warda has a duty to take food to her grandmother, an act of caring; she does not give up when confronted by the wall, but remains there until she finds a way to accomplish her task. Due to her perseverance, the family is not severed. Although in reality there is no magic bird to carry Bethlehem’s youth to relatives on the other side of military installations, simply telling the story is a way of affirming community connections in the face of movement restrictions.

The tale also reveals young people’s perception of their own role and capabilities. Notably, in the story, the other characters (all but one of them adult) register no shock on the wall’s sudden appearance and display no insight into Warda’s situation – they have to ask why she cries and what she is trying to achieve. This could be read as the young people’s own expression of frustration at the apathy and near-fatalistic resignation that characterize many political discussions among adults in Bethlehem. A 19-year-old female student from Bethlehem University commented in illustration of this point during an individual interview: “When people live close to the wall, it starts to seem normal to them. When people from the villages come and see it, when they have to pass through Qalandia [a checkpoint], they’re stunned. People from the outside can’t understand why we accept it.” In the sense that they are marginalized politically, all young people hold such outsider status; Warda’s horror at the wall’s appearance and her determination to find a way round it is a demonstration of the sharp critical sight that her child’s-eye position affords. The fairy tale also succeeds in bringing power out of vulnerability, as the only character capable of producing an answer is an elderly man. Age is associated with wisdom in folklore and fairy tale, but it also means physical weakness, which in Bethlehem is never more visible than in hours spent waiting at checkpoints. Between them, the child and the old man find a way to cross the wall and
reunite families, a narrative device that demonstrates the connection between generations and reveals the skill and ingenuity of weakened people, who eventually achieve what the physical strength of the woodman and the stone-thrower could not. This is another characteristic of fairy tale, whose protagonists are often children.

In this retelling, the major point of departure from the traditional plot is the substitution of a cunning living creature with the wall. Although the wall is not always presented as inanimate in autobiographical stories narrated by Bethlehem youth (several stories treat it as sentient, with a 12-year-old boy from the city centre commenting, “It stares at you. I don’t like to go near it”), in the tale there is no dialogue between Warda and the wall. Unlike the wolf, its presence in the story has no apparent rationale – and it is curiously detached from soldiers, who in autobiographical storytelling are always quick to follow any mention of the wall. To an outside listener, the “motiveless malignancy” that permeates fairy tale (Warner 2014:45) might appear to strip ‘Warda and the Wall’ of all political content, transforming it into a magical tale of triumph over adversity while avoiding the origins of that adverse situation. But from analysing the Bethlehem youth’s purely autobiographical stories (defined as first-person narrations of events that involved them directly) it becomes clear that the wall is so closely associated with stories of uncertainty, familial separation, land confiscation and job loss, bereavement, and fear of army violence that in their fairy tale – which was told amongst themselves, not with outsiders in mind – participants felt no need to elaborate on the circumstances of its construction. Most of them live in the Rachel’s Tomb area, surrounded by the wall; one 11-year-old boy touched on a common experience when he said, “I invite all my class to my birthday every year but some of them still won’t come. They don’t like to go near the wall because of what happened here [in the Second Intifada].” The words ‘the wall’ are adequate in themselves to convey ‘what happened here’ among Bethlehem’s youth. It has become part of a dark shorthand dictionary for violence and political terror. Additionally, the absence of soldiers from the tale may be read as a political decision in its own right: ‘Warda’ presents Bethlehem’s community as the storytellers want it to be, and soldiers have no part in that landscape.

Due to its treatment of space and time, fairy tale as a genre is closely bound up with loss; “once upon a time” and “in a faraway land” become powerful phrases for youth who have experienced home demolition or forced relocation, or who form the fourth generation in Palestinian refugee camps. In one study on the inner lives of very young children born in Gush Katif [the Israeli settlement bloc in Gaza] in the aftermath of the 2005 disengagement, one child consciously began his narration with, “Once there was a faraway land. It is Gush
Katif…” (Gatenio 2008) His old home, in all its former mundane familiarity, has joined the unknown and distant countries that make up the landscape of fairy tale. The familiar phrase emphasizes the paradoxical distance that stretches between him and Gush Katif, the site of which is technically within driving distance but inaccessible to its former settlers; fairy tale vocabulary enables him to conjure up that lost landscape in one poignant phrase. However, in all the interview excerpts quoted in the study, one landscape remains obscured. Few informants make reference to Palestinian life in Gaza, and when such references do occur, they normally relate to rocket fire; the rocketeers remain unseen. One child suggests that Arabs should be happy with what they have, but does not describe what that is. A parallel absence echoes through ‘Warda and the Wall’, which deals solely with Warda and her neighbours; no Israelis feature in the story at all. This suggests that younger children’s basic ideas of community are constructed around familiar faces belonging to people who speak their language and share their street. Yet the presence of the other community has a profound impact on the life of youth in Israel/Palestine, determining where they may live and even where they feel safe walking; and during storytelling sessions with youth in the Aida refugee camp, which took place over nine months, the nature and significance of Israeli Jewish presence in their lives became manifest.

Working with Aida’s young people, I found that creating fairy tales, with their powerful capacity for allegory, is a more effective method than direct questioning of eliciting stories about ‘hidden landscapes’ – in this case, the world on the other side of the separation wall, which winds tightly round the camp. In one early session, I wrote down the names of different places that I knew most of the young people had never seen – Gaza, Tel Aviv, Efrat [a settlement close to Aida], the beach – and asked them each to draw a card and imagine we had a magic carpet that could take us to the place they had drawn out. What would we see there? What would we do? 9-year-old Huwaida, on drawing the card labelled ‘Efrat’, made a face, threw it back into the box, and announced, “I don’t want to tell stories about settlements.” 12-year-old Junayd agreed to base his story on Efrat, but it consisted solely of, “They will shoot us if we go near and there’s a prison there.” (The military prison is not in fact located in Efrat, suggesting that for Junayd the notion of ‘prison’ is bound up with settlements in general, not with one particular place.) All the young people struggled to expand their stories beyond a sentence. But when I used a method based on the archetypal structure of fairy tales, the Six-Part Story Method (Lahad 1992), the picture changed.

Fairy tale is inextricably intertwined with the idea of ‘the Other’, as
Most of the accounts of encounters in fairy land involve incidents and adventures that occurred to someone else. This is the terrain of anecdote, ghost sightings, and old wives’ tales, of oral tradition, hearsay, superstition, and shaggy dog stories: once upon a time and far away among another people… (Warner 2014:15)

The alterity that is woven into the genre mean that fairy tale is an ideal means of exploring young people’s attitudes towards that faraway ‘other people’ and the influence these unknown others have on their own lives. In situations of intractable political violence, the allegorical function of fairy tale makes it possible for youth to approach places and people whom they may not feel able to address in the first-person voice, as shown by Huwaida’s reaction to my question about Efrat. In the Six-Part Story Method (6PSM), participants are asked to draw a story in six stages, receiving a new prompt as they complete each segment. They must create a protagonist and a setting that are far removed from their own context; the protagonist does not need to be human and use of the fantastical is encouraged. In the second stage, they create a mission for the main character; in the third, they introduce obstacles that the protagonist encounters; and in the fourth, they detail helpful factors. The fifth and sixth stages consist of the climax and aftermath. When the drawing is complete, each person narrates the story they have created without interruption. Devised by an Israeli dramatherapist, Mooli Lahad, 6PSM’s purpose is to allow clients to explore taboo or traumatic themes in their lives obliquely, without becoming overwhelmed by their proximity to the ideas raised. (Lahad 1992) However, its origins in oral culture and the fact that the method is based on the structure of traditional tales as opposed to particular psychopathologies mean that it can easily be adapted for use outside mental health settings.

Eight children in Aida camp took part in this activity. Five of them chose birds as their protagonists, and in each story the birds were endangered by some other animal – a wolf, a snake, or other birds. Holding up his picture, 10-year-old Abed narrated:

There once was a bird called Abdullah who lived in a tree with his children. There were big black crows in the sky, waiting to tear Abdullah’s nest to pieces with their beaks. Abdullah was very worried because if the crows destroyed the nest he and his children wouldn’t have a house any more. He decided that he needed to move the nest. His wife helped him and they flew away to another tree carrying twigs in their beaks to make a new nest. Then they carried the babies to the new tree, where they could live safely. The solution was to have a new nest where the crows couldn’t come.

In an earlier activity, the children had drawn maps detailing significant places in their lives; at the centre of Abed’s was a house surrounded by soldiers, with the separation barrier towering over the scene. “He lives by the wall,” another child explained. Abed then drew a spiral
round the wall and the house, commenting as he did so, “This is the noise from their machines – sound grenades, guns, loudspeakers on the jeep, now they are shouting at us…” There is a military base on the other side of the separation barrier, adjacent to Abed’s home. The image of jeeps moving in on the house is mirrored by the story of crows circling ominously above Abdullah’s tree. Abed’s ‘other’ consists of Israeli soldiers; throughout our workshops the extent to which they preoccupy him became clear. He would frequently leave his place to look through the window at the watchtower, saying, “I think they can see us.” During the mapping exercise, he asked permission to go outside and sketch the wall; he returned almost instantly and said he was frightened the soldiers would take him to prison if they saw him drawing. Abed’s mental map is boundaried by soldiers and military installations, which affects everything from the route he takes home to the feelings he has about that home. Stories told by other youth in Aida camp revealed a similar pattern, with soldiers figuring not as individuals, but an amorphous horde that surges on the edges of the camp, often spilling into its alleyways.

Several young people attributed malevolent quasi-magical powers to the soldiers, with 9-year-old Huwaida stating, “They speak even better Arabic than we do and they know everything we’re saying. They can hear everything.” The Aida children’s stories of the army are characterized by the fearsome suggestion of its omnipresence and omniscience. In addition to endowing soldiers with superhuman attributes, the children sometimes used the term ‘green monsters’ for them, a phrase I also heard in central Bethlehem. (“I didn’t always call them green monsters,” one 17-year-old boy from Bethlehem recounted, when asked about the origin of the phrase. “I started to call them that when I saw how they kill.”) In the young people’s imagination the soldiers clearly straddle the boundary between terrifying fantasy and an equally terrifying reality – monstrous, possessed of fascinating and frightening powers that seem barely human, and capable of carrying off unwary children (another common fairy tale trope that here finds its expression in the imprisonment of minors under military law). The soldiers fill the role of the archetypal fairy tale villain, who may present as human (even benign) in some circumstances while secretly possessing magical power and malevolent intent. It is noteworthy that unlike young people in Bethlehem itself, youth in Aida camp struggled to differentiate between the army and civilian Israelis: ‘soldiers’, ‘Israelis’, and ‘Jews’ were all used by them interchangeably, suggesting that the soldier is their one enduring symbol of the other (as well as their one point of contact).

Equally, many Israeli teenagers used ‘Arab’ rather than Palestinian, and their stories suggested that they could not perceive a difference between the cultures and nations of the
Middle East. “We [Jews] have only one state, they [Arabs] have twenty-two,” was a frequent assertion, accompanied by uncertainty over where Palestinian communities were located. Nurit and Stav, sisters aged 16 and 15 respectively, who live in the northern Israeli town Ra’anana, spent five minutes arguing over where the nearest Arab village might be. (Although I had used the word ‘community’ in my question, they responded by speaking about ‘villages’, shrinking the concept and suggesting that they associate Palestinians with the countryside rather than with their own middle-class urban life.) This uncertainty is crystallized in Nurit’s image of Palestinian schools: “When you imagine a school in – where they live, then for me, the first thing that comes up is a very dark place, like not very serious about studies, more about hurting Jews, or getting our country – [pause, laughing] I said our country.” Rather than giving a specific location, Nurit refers to “where they live”; its schools are “dark”, the darkness signifying Nurit’s own lack of knowledge as well as the unseen dangers she senses there. Interestingly, her use of the phrase ‘our country’ prompted her to stop, laughing slightly, and query her own meaning. (Borders emerge in her storytelling as liquid and treacherous, something that will be discussed in detail in the chapter on violence in narrative.) For children from each community, the other initially emerged as a faceless threat – Arabs massing on the uncertain borders of the world’s only Jewish state awaiting their moment to strike; soldiers bursting into houses in the middle of the night, their near-omniscience making it impossible to hide. (Stories from Israeli youth dealt more frequently with the fear and possibility of such violent encounters, while Palestinian peers were more likely to tell autobiographical stories in which violence had actually occurred.) In one of the rare stories that dealt with soldiers as individuals Nariman, an 11-year-old girl from Aida, described how soldiers had arrived in the small hours of the morning to arrest her father:

My mum came into my room and said, “Get up, the soldiers are here, they’re arresting Dad.” At first I said, “You’re joking! You have to be kidding me, Mum,” but then I heard Hebrew in the kitchen and when my sisters and I ran in, the soldiers were there. I couldn’t see Dad. He was in the next room. I could hear him. There were soldiers blocking all the doorways. We don’t know why they were taking him. At first they didn’t want us to say goodbye to him, but then one soldier said “Let them say goodbye,” and I could hug my dad.

Curious at her retelling of events – this was the first story in which an Aida child had quoted a specific soldier – I prompted her for more details about him. Did she know his age? Nariman looked incredulous and asked me to repeat the question, perhaps thinking she must have misheard. “Thirty-four,” she said (the other children giggled). Aware that most Israeli soldiers in the Aida area are conscripts aged between eighteen and twenty-one, I recognized
that this was a guess. “What did he look like?” “Like all the others.” As soldiers entering camp homes are uniformed and often masked, on one level these statements simply reflect the difficulty of telling one masked armed man from another. However, the young people’s inability to pinpoint the soldiers’ age range has additional significance, as many fairy tale characters are ageless; specific ages are rarely given, or else they are so fantastical as to be impossible in real life. This is a world in which jinn can live inside bottles for millennia and a princess might sleep for a hundred years. The soldier’s perceived agelessness locates him within a genre that renders him eerily alien. Like many fairy tale characters, he is not bound by the constraints of space and time, and so does not have to be physically present in order to inculcate terror in the refugee camp youth who sat listening to one another’s stories. Like the wall itself, certain objects are enough to conjure up associations of the army, meaning that the soldiers’ presence is felt even in their absence. In lieu of a story, one boy silently held out a rubber-coated bullet, following another boy’s account of being tear-gassed on the way home from school (tear gas was leaking into the room as we spoke). The rubber bullet fell into my palm with the finality of a full stop; he did not elaborate on why he was giving it to me, trusting in the object itself to carry the story:

[F]airy tale magic works through the uncanny activity of these inert objects, and it deepens the sense that invisible powers exist around us, and intensifies the thrill, the strangers and terror of the pervasive atmosphere of enchantment. Magical worlds are a danger zone (Warner 2014:30).

The soldiers, the ‘invisible powers’, darken the edges of the Aida children’s mental maps, and through fairy tale the young people give voice to the terror that these powers inspire. Meanwhile, Israeli youth in settlements may keep a wary eye on the Palestinian communities clustered in the valleys, located behind scarlet army signs that proclaim the area dangerous to Jewish Israeli citizens. But terror is only one aspect of the hidden landscape, albeit the immediately dominant aspect. A close linguistic analysis of the metaphors and symbols that youth develop through their storytelling suggests that fear of the other is percolated by curiosity, and that on probing the imagined boundaries of community, the idiom of terror eventually gives way to an ambivalent dialogue with the figures that populate the young people’s unseen landscapes.

A lexicon of symbols
In her study on post-memory, the term she applies to the relationship that the descendants of Holocaust survivors have with the genocide, Marianne Hirsch posits that collective and
cultural memory cannot be “mediated through embodied practice but solely through symbolic systems.” (Hirsch 2012:33) Their physical and temporal distance from the events and places that shaped their parents and grandparents’ lives has caused children of survivors to graft their parents’ experiences onto their own surroundings by recognizing everyday objects as symbols of the horror that their parents endured, a symbolic system that Ruth Wajnryb terms ‘iconic messages’:

Iconic messages refer to the meanings embedded in certain tangible objects, certain distinctive behaviours or attitudes, and certain formal occasions that resonate with Holocaustal significance…Long before I knew about crematoria, about bodies in concentration camps being burned in death factories, I knew there was something ominous about industrial chimneys…Without knowing why, I used to dread passing them. Something happened to my father's demeanour. He tensed and then went inward somewhere in his own mind, and I knew to keep out of sight and earshot in the interim. (Wajnryb 2009:265)

Symbol and metaphor are particularly important in the narrative lives of children who are growing up with an inter-generational legacy of persecution and political violence, especially when outward discussion is limited, as they enable covert exploration of these hidden landscapes. The development of such iconic languages is reminiscent of Lacan’s work on language and the unconscious, in which he presents Poe’s short story ‘The Purloined Letter’ as an example of how a signifier (represented by the eponymous letter and its substitutions) has primacy over both subject and signified (the letter’s true contents are not known to every person who handles it, with some handlers being unaware of the counterfeits in circulation). “The actions of each of the characters are determined in relation to the letter in the same way that the subject, without being aware of it, is acted upon by the signifiers of language in relation to the unconscious.” (Dor 1998:49) Wajnryb’s father, who did not speak openly about the Holocaust in the home, may have been unaware that factory chimneys caused his daughter to retreat “beyond sight and earshot” in recognition that the chimneys formed the visible edge of a horrific hidden landscape. They had come to share a symbolic vocabulary without him necessarily being aware of it, even though Wajnryb did not grasp what exactly the chimneys signified for her father. The power of the signifier over the signified in the creation of metaphor is a reminder that in analysing the young people’s storytelling, I am not speaking so much about the stories they told, but more about how they told them – and what I heard. This uncertainty is a continual reminder of the hidden landscapes that lie between teller and listener, and the blind spots that exist for both. It also left me intrigued at the way
Israeli and Palestinian youth use identical symbols (particularly stones and stone-throwing) to signify different things, yet presume a shared vocabulary.

The entrance to Aida refugee camp is spanned by an enormous rusting key, a symbol of the houses that were lost in the 1948 Nakba, which is known in the refugee community as al-miftah al-awda [the key of return]. In the Aida youth’s storytelling, this key emerges as a bridge between their grandparents’ Palestine and their own present. On playing a game with a set of dice that carry images designed to spark storytelling, Abed rolled a picture of a key, saying immediately, “Al-awda [the return].” This is an explicitly political concept; all the Aida youth I met were conversant with UN resolution 194, which grants refugees the right to return to their homes, and human rights discourse informed their storytelling more broadly. Yet for these youth, al-awda would mean a return to a landscape that is not merely hidden, but irrevocably changed; their grandparents’ villages no longer exist. Despite the influence these places have on their inner lives, the youth do not associate the key purely with the past: several connected it with the current Israeli policy of home demolition, expressing fear of homelessness and describing demolitions that had recently occurred in the nearby village of Walajeh. This suggests that for them ‘return’ does not simply mean the recreation of their grandparents’ Palestine but the establishment of justice in their present-day lives. As one 18-year-old young woman commented, “I am sick of trying to prove to them [Israelis] that I am a person. We were real people once, human, and I want to be a person again.” In an example of signifier’s primacy over signified, 15-year-old Stav gave “unfinished houses” and “a deserty place” as her mental image of Palestinian communities, suggesting that for her, the state of these structures signifies a bleak and incomplete life. Meanwhile, for young Palestinians they can indicate either lack of funds to complete the project or demolition threats (the army can place a stop work order on homes under construction), as well as being a metaphoric expression of the desire for a secure home.

It should be noted that many Palestinian refugees who lived through the Nakba treat it as ongoing dispossession rather than a historical event (Kassem 2009:58), which means that in explicitly linking their own lives under occupation with their grandparents’ experiences the children are contributing to an established community narrative that has been written into the alleyways of the camp. Walls have been painted with the names of former villages, each one represented by a tent, another symbol that is ubiquitous in Palestinian refugee camps. Streets and shops are routinely named after destroyed villages, in “an embodied and communal act of remembering. In telling people where you bought your refrigerator, explaining where you live, or walking your daughter to school, you are not only recalling the places of the past,
but…investing them with new meanings and associations in the present.” (Davis 2010:4) The Aida youth’s immediate environment is overlaid with this figurative and highly politicized map, but interestingly they did not spontaneously talk about the lost villages that have been introduced to their alleyways. A powerful metaphor that emerged in many stories was that of birds in flight, but no child made a lost village into their destination, even though most of them had introduced themselves to me as being from those villages. 12-year-old Junayd, having narrated the story of Abdullah the bird, connected the story to his present-day life:

*Junayd:* If I could be a bird I would fly away from here.
*Facilitator:* Where?
*Junayd:* Other places, the sea. I don't know where exactly. But then I would come back. I would always come back.
*Interviewer:* Why is that?
*Junayd:* To look at the wall. If I didn't come back I would forget what they did to us, and that's like forgetting me.

The ‘other places’ remain hidden; Junayd's principal concern is with the tangible present, represented by the wall and the soldiers, whose influence on his life has been so profound that he considers them to be integral to his sense of self. However, unseen and physically unreachable places are always tantalizingly present in Junayd's stories, even though he does not elaborate on them. In the first workshop, on being asked to draw a mental map of his community, he filled three-quarters of the page with the separation barrier, with al-Aqsa Mosque and a soldier behind it. Unusually the wall features a door. “It's for soldiers though. We can't get through it. Too many locks.” On looking closely at the drawing, I realized that he had drawn the figure he identified as a soldier without a gun and with a face. In the other children's drawings the soldiers were depicted in visor helmets, faceless:

*Facilitator:* Why is this soldier smiling?
*Junayd:* He's happy because he's occupying Jerusalem. [Pause, continuing to draw] I like the soldiers. [Chaperon exclaims, interjecting, “Why?”] I love them and I hate them. I hate them when they do these things, like now [gesturing to the window] but they are like us. I think they are like us when they go home.

Junayd was the only young person in Aida to demonstrate awareness that soldiers have lives outside their army role, and to feel that this might be significant. In another meeting, he drew a picture that he identified as a settlement house, which again featured soldiers, one on each side of a closed door. “You can't go inside. They will level their guns at you.” Junayd's stories and accompanying artwork suggest a strong if uneasy curiosity about Israeli home life, a hidden landscape that is symbolized by locked doors and distinguished by an interest in
how Israelis might relate to Jerusalem (Junayd identified the figure in his drawing as an occupying soldier, but depicts him without a uniform and wearing a smile; at first sight I thought this was a representation of Junayd himself). While Junayd's stories always circle back to the concrete realities in Aida, the symbols they contain suggest that the hidden landscape of Israeli society is always present to him, prompting him to describe an alternative community in which soldiers have a legitimate place: immediately after describing the soldier on his mental map as “occupying Jerusalem”, he spoke of the soldiers’ trips “home”, a word denoting genuine belonging.

Political graffiti on the separation barrier makes Aida camp a rich area in which to consider the role of symbolism in personal and community narratives. For one workshop, I took photographs of camp graffiti and invited participants to tell stories based on the images. This exercise provided valuable clues into participants’ use of space and experience of their home environment, as some youth reported that they had not seen specific graffiti due to fear of the area where the images are located. One image showed Handala, the emblematic child-figure created by the refugee cartoonist Naji Ali, skipping hand in hand towards the horizon with Vittorio Arrigoni, an Italian peace activist murdered by Islamist paramilitaries in Gaza in 2011. Arrigoni's name was apparently not known to the children. 11-year-old Nariman said of the picture, “This is a man who has been to get his child out of jail. His son was imprisoned by the Jews for six months and now he’s free.” All the children identified with Handala – “He’s a boy from the camp” – and the stories elicited by this image almost all involved throwing stones at the army, which is typical behaviour among camp youth. 9-year-old Huwaida related: “My dad forbids me to go near the wall in case the soldiers kidnap me, but I go, and my [female] cousins and I throw stones at the soldiers, because we want to defend our land.” Throwing stones has become a metaphor in itself; 15-year-old Sami, relating the story of his arrest for throwing stones at a military jeep, said, “One soldier tried to be nice. He asked did I know that stones can kill. I told him of course, David killed Goliath.” This suggests that Sami views stone-throwing as a means of communication rather than simply a method of fighting; it identifies him as the weaker party but also emphasizes his determination and hints at eventual victory. 15-year-old Hanin, a Palestinian girl keeping a diary during the Second Intifada, took the symbolism further and identified herself as a stone:

We are living in the land of peace but the circumstances that we went through and the feelings that we go through, especially when we feel that our country is being taken away from us, made us as hard as stone. So you see my dear friend, I am a stone, one of the many stones that are fighting the enemy. (Atallah and van Teeffelen 2004:121)
Hanin frequently refers to her Catholic faith in her diary, which imbues her declaration “I am a stone” with biblical significance: “Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight…” (2 Peter 4:5) She may have deployed this symbolism consciously, as the image of living stones is prominent in the Palestinian Christian community, standing in poignant contrast to the stones heaped in villages destroyed during the Nakba. Hanin’s conception of herself also invokes memories of the First Intifada (1987 – 1990), often known as intifada al-hijara (the intifada of the stones), in which young Palestinians (atfal al-hijara, children of the stones) were at the forefront of political protest. Through metaphor she indicates that she is part of an ongoing struggle, the stones part of a signifying chain that stretches back before she was born.

For young Israelis in this study, stones glance off armoured bus windows, jolting them into panic; they shatter windscreens and signify inexplicable hatred and disregard for human life. A 17-year-old boy from the settlement of Kfar Etzion, on hearing I lived in Bethlehem, exclaimed, “No way! Do you know any terrorists?” I asked him what he meant by the term. “Someone who throws stones.” Later he would ask curiously, “Why do they do that? Throw rocks?” Other participants, notably Nurit and Stav, theorized that Palestinian children were being groomed by their parents for violent acts. Stones, which for many Palestinian participants are symbols of resilience and agency and embody a long history of pain and protest, have become signifiers of irrational and inexplicable violence that is planned by adults. In Sami’s story, this cut between signifier and signified is sutured by his awareness that the story of David and Goliath is common to Jews and Muslims, enabling him to push soldiers into an unexpected and potentially destabilizing encounter with the story and the meanings it holds for them. For Huwaida, throwing stones sends a message to her family as well as to the army; she is signalling her right to active participation in what she defines as “defending the land” and rejecting her family’s attempts to restrict her movements. Although “[children’s] ability to claim ownership of space and place is curtailed by their dependent status in society and by the power of adults to define appropriate places for children” (Leonard 2006:231), the development of a symbolic language incorporating doors, keys, birds, and stones enables young people to stake a broader claim to territory, freedom of movement, and political participation through their storytelling.

Their relationship with less-familiar symbols, which do not hold the same near-universal currency in Palestine, was also politically charged. This is most clearly evidenced by the swastika that I discovered on the wall of a camp house, and which I interpreted as an
assertion of pro-Nazi anti-Semitic views. During the image-based workshop described above I placed the swastika among the other photographs without comment and invited the youth (all aged between 9 and 12) to choose any picture as the inspiration for their storytelling. None could identify the swastika correctly and they showed no interest in it. However, a small group of 14 and 15-year-olds who came to see what we were doing recognized it immediately: “That’s the Nazi sign.” Seeing that their younger peers had begun to write stories in the margins of photographs, they asked if they could do the same for the swastika, leaving the caption, “This is the sign that the Israeli government likes to show to the Germans to remind them of what they did to the Jews.” These young people demonstrated awareness of the genocidal nature and scope of the Holocaust, but their response to the atrocity was governed by their own political situation; they viewed the mass murder of Jews in terms of exploitation of Holocaust memory on the part of the Israeli government and the implications that such exploitation might have for their own lives. However, they did not attempt to deny or minimalize the Holocaust or to establish parity between their own situation and the Nazi genocide, a common pattern in Palestinian engagement with the Holocaust. (Gur-Ze’ev and Pappé 2003) Rather than mapping Jewish suffering in Nazi Europe onto their own experience in the occupied West Bank, they put geographical distance between themselves and the Holocaust by noting that it took place in Germany. This suggests that they are able to make a distinction between the Holocaust itself (in which they stake no personal claim) and its aftermath (in which they do).

All the youth in Aida camp were at their most fluent and detailed when relating day-to-day personal realities. They were more hesitant to share stories about the hidden landscapes beyond the separation barrier, whether literal or figurative. This may in part be due to a desire to be factually accurate about the unseen places, but could also be attributed to the unusual conception of space and place that became apparent through the symbols that appeared most frequently in their stories and drawings. As Christmas neared, the young people became excited about the tree that would be erected in Bethlehem town square and described it multiple times. “We are going to see it. There will be a bus. We go every year.” I realized that for my participants this represented a major journey, as evidenced by the following conversation with 10-year-old Reem:

*Reem:* I want to leave the camp. It’s hard to stay here with the soldiers and the wall. I’ll go somewhere else…I know someone who went to America. It’s better to be there. It’s a long way from here.

*Facilitator:* Where would you like to live, and why?
Reem: Bethlehem or Beit Jala. There’s no occupation there.

Beit Jala and Bethlehem are within a five-minute walk of the camp entrance, but Reem perceives the distance as being much greater, as like many refugee youth she rarely leaves the camp. For her Bethlehem does not constitute part of her wider neighbourhood, but is a place perpetually decked in fairy lights and represented by a Christmas tree, the scene of a party. Consequently it may be that many neighbouring communities, whether Israeli or Palestinian, simply feel too distant for young people to incorporate them into a sustained and personally meaningful narrative. Another possibility is that the figurative vocabulary of Aida’s youth does not equip them to explore Israeli life in depth. As the Gaza-based psychiatrist Eyad El-Sarraj wrote, “Occupation is a form of language. The child is well aware of the difference between the living conditions in his or her dirty camp and the living conditions in the newly built Israeli settlement.” (El-Sarraj 1998:172) Huwaida’s refusal to incorporate settlements into her storytelling may be read in light of this awareness and an attendant sense of humiliation. Equally, while Junayd was visibly interested in Israeli home life, his most elaborate stories involved guns, tanks, and watchtowers. His considerations of a non-militarized Israeli life were given in shorter sentences and punctuated by frequent pauses. He seemed to lack the linguistic resources to convey this alternative scenario that he was nonetheless curious about; I was reminded of my own first hesitant attempts to speak Arabic and Hebrew. Going beyond symbolism and metaphor, the centrality of military apparatus to Aida youth’s stories makes it more akin to grammatical structure; when this is taken away, the stories become more fragmented and disjointed. Consequently the interfaces between hidden and known landscapes are most frequently denoted through pauses, whispering, and the visible struggle to identify the most suitable word – the construction of the story rather than the story itself. A richer figurative vocabulary is needed to access such landscapes, leading naturally to a discussion of the relationship between Arabic and Hebrew and the role of bilingualism in children’s storytelling.

Mother tongues and other tongues
Language is one of the sharpest demarcations of contested space in Palestine/Israel, encapsulated in an anecdote related by the sociolinguist Yasir Suleiman. During a walk from East Jerusalem [predominantly Arab] to West Jerusalem [predominantly Jewish] his son pointed out that they always switched from Arabic to more neutral English when passing a certain point. “My son had intuitively identified a linguistic boundary which, to my
astonishment, coincided with where the physical boundary between East and West Jerusalem had stood until 1967…” (Suleiman 2004:12) Although the boy had never seen the wall and barbed wire that had divided Jerusalem along ethnic lines, the history of that division had entered his consciousness through his parents’ shift in language as they entered an area where they felt unable to use their mother-tongue. Language can indicate how a young person relates to a particular place. It is therefore unsurprising that bilingual education has been advanced as a means of creating a more just and inclusive society in Palestine/Israel, with its proponents viewing it as “empowerment pedagogy” that will lead to “greater cultural integration and pluralism.” (Bekerman and Horenczyk 2004:390) Shared languages are viewed as a precursor to shared spaces, an idea that is reflected in curriculum design for bilingual schools. Initially the curriculum emphasized perfect symmetry between the two languages, with the sole provider of bilingual education in Israel hiring Jewish and Arab co-teachers to work in each classroom. Eventually the provider would come to stress Arabic over Hebrew in an effort to address the lower Arabic competency level of Jewish students. However, Jewish Israeli acquisition of Arabic remains slower than Palestinian Israeli acquisition of Hebrew due to

[a]n adaptive, wider socio-political system in which Arabic carries little symbolic power. In Bourdieu’s (1991) terms, it can be said in general that in Israel, speakers of Hebrew have more cultural capital in the linguistic marketplace than those who speak Arabic.

It is not clear that the parents participating in the initiative are interested in changing the existing power relations in Israel. The Jewish parents…while clearly liberally inclined and hopeful in creating more humane and respectful environments for the Palestinian-Israelis, do not necessarily see the need for radical change. The Palestinian parents, who belong to an aspiring middle class, understand the advantages of linguistically empowering their children’s entrance into the reigning bureaucracy and the need to adapt to the rules of the game…We cannot assume that solutions to these issues can be found in the narrow limits of the school and their surrounding communities. (Bekerman 2011:203-204)

The asymmetries that exist outside the bilingual classroom affect how languages are used within the classroom. I witnessed the influence of these asymmetries over the course of three separate visits to an integrated school in Jerusalem, which later I explored during storytelling work with students. Discussing my project with an Israeli Jewish staff member, I explained that I was particularly interested in the transmission of forbidden histories across the language boundary. In illustration, I quoted the questioning title that the Nakba remembrance organization Zochrot [Hebrew: ‘remembering’] has given to its education kit, “How do we say ‘Nakba’ in Hebrew?” The staff member looked quizzical, replying, “I think it’s the same
word, actually.” Even after I had explained that I was not looking for a literal translation but attempting to understand the political, social, and psychological aspects of discussing the Nakba in a bilingual milieu, he did not appear to view this as a necessary question, despite the hostile or ambivalent attitudes experienced by many Palestinians towards the Hebrew language. (Suleiman 2004:142)

Rafael, a 15-year-old student at Yad b’Yad who describes himself as an Arab Jew (“And that’s not totally politically correct”), outlined the school’s linguistic dynamics unprompted after I commented on his fluency in Arabic:

The dominant language in the school, though, is Hebrew. For Arab youth it’s easier to learn Hebrew, because they’re in it – Hebrew’s basically around them when they go to the mall, and they get to experience Hebrew and practise Hebrew every day of their lives, even after school. And for the Jewish youth it’s actually harder also because they started opening up and listening to Arabs and learning Arabic only as soon as they went to the school. And they only experienced speaking Arabic in the school. So the dominant language is Hebrew.

Arabic is presented here in terms of a profound and challenging encounter for the Jewish children, connected with the time when “they started opening up and listening to Arabs.” Learning Arabic is synonymous with experiencing Palestinian stories. If becoming bilingual means ‘opening up’ to those stories, remaining monolingual implies a state of insularity and closure. In Hebrew this phrasing is reminiscent of army terminology, which ‘opens up’ roads or places areas under ‘closure’. Learning Arabic emerges as a way of undermining such restrictions. Meanwhile Palestinian students are described as being ‘in’ Hebrew, a preposition that transforms the language into a physical location. Their Jewish peers are not said to be ‘in’ Arabic. This mirrors the terminology that is used to describe regional demographics: it is common to hear ‘Palestinians in Israel’ mentioned, but rarely ‘Israelis in Palestine’. Hebrew’s linguistic dominance parallels Israeli control over space and resources.

Three main attitudes towards Hebrew emerged among Palestinian youth in this study: the perception of it as the language of a colonizing power, which had replaced their own names for many towns and villages; as camouflage that may be adopted for personal safety; and as contraband. Budour, a 15-year-old Palestinian girl with Israeli citizenship who lives in the Jewish-Arab cooperative village of Neve Shalom/Wahat as Salaam (the name means ‘Oasis of Peace’ in both languages), described the power dynamics that are played out in the village through language:
They [Jewish peers] can’t speak Arabic as good as we speak Hebrew. First of all they’re shy, but it mainly happens because we go to a Jewish [secondary] school, so they stop learning Arabic at a point. Also, most of the people around us speak Hebrew and everything in this country just goes in Hebrew. [Laughs] So it really affects us, even though we live in this so-called bubble, the things that are happening outside affect us...[T]he conversation won’t flow in Arabic the way it flows in Hebrew. I think that the older generation cares about it more than us. I don’t know why. I don’t know if it’s bad that we don’t care about it as much as they care about it, because language is a very important thing in culture, but...the fact that we’re having this conversation is more important than which language we’re doing it. This is my opinion. But I still think it’s not OK that in a village that both communities live in, the language we speak in when we’re together is Hebrew, mostly.

Budour makes a distinction between communication and the language in which that communication takes place, stating that the interaction is “more important” than the language. However, she also identifies that Hebrew’s dominance in the village indicates a darker interaction with the community beyond: structural inequalities and political violence – “things that are happening outside” – ensure that Hebrew remains preeminent. A Jewish teenager from Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom described how some Jewish adults on the village council had become defensive when Arab colleagues requested fully bilingual council meetings, with one Jewish woman commenting, “It doesn’t feel like the same Neve Shalom anymore.” In that story, Hebrew dominance is presented as the norm, even for this cooperative village. Budour gives a painful example of such norms when she describes her departure from Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom’s integrated primary school for secondary education in a Jewish school, where her mother-tongue immediately casts her as an unwanted outsider:

I remember that I went to class, and I talked to my friend named Rafaat [a Palestinian boy from the village], and I said, I think I only said his name or asked him to give me something, and they [Jewish classmates] just turned around and looked at us...I even remember someone saying, “I thought this was a very good school, why do we have Arab kids in it.”

Use of Arabic can lead to humiliating and sometimes even dangerous consequences. 19-year-old Amal, a young Palestinian woman from Dheisheh refugee camp whose father (a registered Jerusalem resident from Shuafat refugee camp) is a driver for the Israeli bus company Egged, explained:

Last year an Arab bus driver was killed by some Israelis, because they knew he was an Arab, so my father – when I call him at work he doesn’t speak to me in Arabic, sometimes he replies to me in Hebrew or English or anything other than Arabic, so I can understand that he can’t speak to me in Arabic right now, or else maybe they’ll
know. And when he was a taxi driver, lots of times the Israelis, when they know he’s an Arab they wouldn’t take a taxi with him.

Amal’s words came back to me in autumn 2015, when night-time gangs of right-wing Israelis were combing West Jerusalem streets in search of Palestinian labourers to beat up, asking passers-by for the time to see if they could detect an Arab accent. For some of the young Palestinians in this study, Arabic is associated with the comfort of home and the safety of Arab-majority areas; Hebrew is a precarious mask that is adopted beyond those borders. For others, knowledge of Hebrew is seen as risky in itself. 9-year-old Huwaida, on being asked if she understood the soldiers in the checkpoint, replied, “No, I am a good Muslim and I don’t speak Hebrew”, raising her hands as though to ward off the question. After the other youth had left the room, she whispered that she is able to write her name in Hebrew. She declined to say where she had learned, evidently treating Hebrew as illicit material that is incompatible with her own linguistic heritage and religious identity.

A similar sense of treacherousness emerged during another visit to the bilingual school Yad b’Yad, where I listened to ninth-grade students (aged 14 – 15) describing the attitudes to bilingualism that they encounter outside the school walls.

**Jewish Israeli student:** Some of my Jewish friends got so excited when they heard I study here. “Wow! You learn Arabic! That’s so cool! How do you say ‘I love you’ in Arabic? Can you write my name in Arabic?” [Laughter] Some of them went, “The only reason Arabs are in your school is because they want to learn our secrets and destroy us from the inside.”

**Palestinian Israeli student (interrupting):** I will destroy you. [Laughter] I live in a Jewish neighbourhood. We are the only Muslim family and it’s hard because they [neighbours] think I am the only Muslim who is nice…I don’t speak Arabic in the street near my house now, especially after this summer [2014].

**Jewish Israeli student (2):** After the summer war all my friends on the outside say that the school can’t work. That’s it, done. They ask why I want to go to school with our enemies. Someone asked my mother why she’s letting me learn Arabic, if she wants me to marry an Arab...

Bilingualism is associated with treachery (“learning our secrets”), destruction, and cultural disintegration through intermarriage. During my field research, the Jerusalem school was targeted by arsonists, who destroyed a first-grade classroom and daubed racist anti-Arab slogans on the wall. Rania, a 15-year-old Palestinian student, opened our storytelling session with this event:
I don’t know if you know this, but our school was burned, so that day is important, and the day after, what we did with it…A few months ago our school was burned by three young people, I think they were from Lehava [extremist Jewish anti-miscegenation organization], and then they wrote – they burned the first-grade classroom, and they wrote stuff on the walls with spray paint. Like, they wrote “No coexistence with cancer” and stuff like that. So some parents went there and some kids went there and they made posters, and since the first-graders didn’t have their classrooms, they needed to fix them, so the next day our class said we should like give them our classroom and we will be in the library, so it will be easier on them. So we did that and our teacher said it will be nice if we come in the morning and – the first-graders were scared, so it will be nice if we take them to their classes and everything. So we did that, and we wrote more posters. I think this thing bonded us more than separated us, because it was a really happy moment, but it was sad. We were writing “We all want to live in peace”, “Arabs and Jews want to be friends”, and stuff like that. We always get stuff written on the walls, but that was the hardest one. If you write something, we stop caring about it, and we got used to it, but when someone gets inside the school and they burn it, it’s more something that can – like what if we were in the school, and they did something to us? So it became really scary.

Walls are contested spaces in Israel/Palestine and they function as a powerful symbols in the children’s storytelling, most notably when Junayd states that he needs to “look at the separation wall” in order to avoid “forgetting me.” The wall has become his mirror. One day Huwaida reported that she had seen a soldier drawing or writing on the separation barrier. I asked her what he had drawn, assuming it had been offensive. Huwaida replied indignantly, “I don’t know, it was too far for me to see, but that’s our wall.” This story shows that graffiti is a way of asserting control over a space while indicating that it is possible for youth to detach the wall from its actual purpose and original context, a phenomenon that has also been observed among young people growing up in close proximity to the ‘peace walls’ in Belfast, which have become entrenched in the physical and cultural landscape. (McKnight 2011) Rania’s reaction to anti-Arab graffiti (“If you write something, we stop caring about it, and we got used to it…” is a blunter example of this process of desensitization. The arson attack reignited her awareness of writing’s destructive power, with her linking the graffiti with the fire in one sentence (“And then they wrote – they burned…”) In responding to the attack by creating posters, intended to be displayed on walls, the children were using their own writing to reassert power over their space.

Thinking about the anthropology of space and violence, the Israeli architect and scholar Eyal Weizman has argued that “the logic of visibility – to both see and be seen – dictated the overall design” of settlements, the separation barrier, and military installations. Their function is to
demonstrate the presence of the occupation’s power. [Prime Minister] Sharon, flying over the Occupied Territories once remarked: “Arabs should see Jewish lights every night from 500 metres.” Tactical consideration therefore engaged simultaneously with both seeing and being seen. The sense of being always under the gaze was meant to make the colonized internalize the facts of their domination. (Weizman 2007:81-82)

Daubing sinister graffiti on school walls also generates a feeling of being under observation, and by writing wall posters, Yad b’Yad students responded to that malevolent gaze. This act of retaking space through writing bilingual posters strengthened Rania’s sense of community: I think this thing bonded us more than separated us, because it was a really happy moment…”

Equally, Huwaida’s comically proprietorial story about the wall can be seen as a way of subverting the military might that the wall is intended to convey: in her story she is the observing figure and the soldier the object of her gaze, and she stakes ownership over the wall. His drawing or writing is too far away to be seen; even the language he uses cannot be discerned, and Huwaida’s story takes pre-eminence.

In spite of experiencing such violent opposition to the idea of bilingual education, students from integrated schools report that their experience of bilingualism is largely positive. 14-year-old Mouran explained:

People have graffitied things on our walls in the past, but it was worse that they actually came inside the school. I was scared after I heard and I didn’t want to come, but then my friends reminded me that that’s what those people wanted – to scare us. I came the first day, and every day after that. Now I do feel safe inside the school, and even stronger for it. It was amazing how many people came to support us. There was one girl from a Jewish school who came up to me and said in Arabic: “I hope that one day Jews and Arabs can live together.” I was surprised and speechless – and moved that she could say that to me in my language. (Yad b’Yad 2015)

When the arsonists violated Mouran’s sense of security and belonging in the school, it was a Jewish stranger’s use of Arabic that helped to restore her trust and confidence. Interestingly the Jewish girl’s act also leaves her “speechless”, which emphasizes its unexpected nature: Mouran is not accustomed to hearing Jews use Arabic beyond the walls of Yad b’Yad. Bilingualism (or at least the idea of bilingualism) enhances and expands community by enabling young people to draw closer emotionally. It also renders hidden landscapes public, as it is impossible for the schools’ immediate neighbours, no matter what their own ethno-linguistic group, to ignore the existence of the ‘other’ community when a bilingual education project exists in their street. In describing both the harassment and the support they have received while wearing school shirts in public, students displayed an awareness of the
school’s prominence and the challenge it poses to monolithic understandings of history and community.

However, bilingualism in itself is not necessarily enough to rework community, and attempts to use the language of the other can entrench rather than heal divisions. 19-year-old Amal’s reaction to optional Arabic language classes in segregated Jewish Israeli schools was one of suspicion:

I consider Israel as a government as an enemy. It’s a government of occupation. So when the government is trying to recruit their people, to – they’re not teaching them Arabic just to get to know Arabs more. I feel like they’re trying to teach them just to get more information about Arab lives and Arab people, to use it against us, of course, not to get to know us and be friends with us.

Amal’s response is not rare. Many Palestinians view Arabic proficiency among Jewish Israelis as a strategy for maintaining army occupation, aware that Israeli students who opt to take Arabic in high school are viewed by the Israeli intelligence service as a pool of potential recruits. (Spolsky and Shohamy 1999) In other cases, well-intentioned use of Arabic can highlight divisive inequalities without the speaker registering it. 17-year-old Yuval, a boy from a Gush Etzion settlement, brought up his father’s efforts to learn Arabic when I asked if he himself had any interactions with Palestinians:

Not usually, no. You can see them in Rami Levy [a supermarket at Gush Etzion Junction], you see them, you talk to them sometimes. My father, he learned to speak Arabic, and it’s a new language and he really likes to speak this. [Laughs] So every time when he meets someone he’s trying to speak to them in Arabic to show that he knows how to speak it. And sometimes what will happen – the neighbours next to my home, my house, we have an Arab neighbour, his name is Fars. Faris. Faris. [Attempting to pronounce the Arabic ‘r’] He’s a farmer, and they have a donkey. And sometimes we want a donkey, so we go to him and pay him and take the donkey for a couple of hours. It’s a kind of connection, but a real connection there isn’t.

In common with many settlement businesses, the Rami Levy supermarket chain employs Palestinians in menial roles, primarily as shelf-stackers and bag-packers. Their interactions with Jewish colleagues and customers are under scrutiny. A rabbi based in Yuval’s community, Gideon Perl, approached the chain’s owner when rumours spread that a Jewish cashier had become romantically involved with a Palestinian bag-packer. The owner gave public assurances that he was “against assimilation” and that the employees concerned had left, while press reports circulated that the Palestinian worker had been sacked. Perl commented to the media, “You need a whip to teach people a lesson after something like this happens.” (Levinson 2011) Yuval, while recognizing that his father’s attempts to make
conversation with the Palestinian workers in such a setting do not indicate “a real connection”, does not raise the class dynamic revealed by Arabic-language conversations that take place over the packing of groceries and the loan of a donkey. The settings in which Arabic is most frequently used by Jewish Israelis (in military checkpoints and prisons, and when addressing Palestinian labourers) illustrate the stratification of society on ethnic lines.

By contrast, Palestinian teenagers tended to be very sensitive to these inequalities and the way in which language can highlight them. They are evident throughout Rania’s storytelling. Although broadly positive about integrated bilingual education, she identifies times when her residency in a Jewish neighbourhood has created an uncomfortable sense of dislocation with use of the Hebrew language at the root:

It’s a religious Jewish place. When I was younger, it was like, OK, I didn’t know a lot of things, but now it’s like – I feel like, “Why do I live here? I’m not supposed to live here. This is not the place I’m supposed to be in.” Also I checked the streets’ history and everything and it’s kind of Zionist, so it’s like really weird for me living there, on ha’Mapilim Street… I feel like I’m supposed to be, all my friends live in Arab streets and places like – Arabs live there. It’s just weird for me to live there. I feel like, I don’t want to say this, but I feel like I’m cheating on my people…When I told them [other Palestinian children] where I lived, they were like, “What? Why would you live there? There are no Arabs there.”

When probed over the origin her discomfort, Rania returned to the street’s biblical Hebrew name, stating that she felt out of place on a road named after an ancient Jewish pilgrimage. Its Hebrew name emphasizes her outsider status and her lack of connection with that history; the neighbourhood’s Palestinian past is not referenced by the sign. The street name is written in English and Arabic as well as Hebrew, in a concession to the country’s multilingual nature, but the transplant of the Farsi letter P into the Arabic word (there is no P in Arabic) only emphasizes the dislocation felt by Rania. Her choice of the phrase “cheating on my people” carries romantic undertones, reminiscent of opponents’ fears that integrated education will lead to intermarriage. Given that bilingualism itself has been transformed into a symbol of treachery and linguistic purity is conflated with patriotism, it is possible for language to tacitly reinforce divisions between communities and histories even within a bilingual environment; while integrated education does bring children into contact with the Other, that contact is still circumscribed by the expectations associated with each language.

Although wary of existing Arabic curricula in Israeli schools, Amal views the acquisition of Hebrew by Palestinians as a way to challenge discrimination and reduce fear, with full bilingualism the sign of a truly equal society:
At the checkpoints, the soldiers will use Hebrew. When they attack the [refugee] camp, like in 2002 and so on, soldiers will obviously talk in Hebrew. So when you understand what they’re saying, you’ll understand what they’re trying to do. And the language creates some kind of fear. As a kid I used to see these strangers with guns, speaking this – you know, a language I can’t understand, so I used to feel more scared. But if you understand what they’re saying, they’re probably talking about something very normal, you know. So I wanted to – and also out of curiosity, I wanted to know what they say. Like, in general...

One time – a lot of times, actually, [Israeli passengers] think my father is an Arab so he won’t understand Hebrew, so they used to insult him…They would insult him in Hebrew or English, thinking he’s a dumb Arab. But a lot of times he would insult them back, because he’s not stupid, he speaks fluent English and Hebrew…You feel some kind of strength if you can argue, have an argument with an Israeli in Hebrew. First of all, it shows that you’re not stupid, and second of all it shows that you can defend yourself and make a point. And language, it is a barrier, so that’s why I think all Palestinians should be interested in learning in Hebrew. Because Israelis are interested in learning Arabic, by the way. They want to know us more, yes.

Amal is only able to view bilingualism among Israelis as positive if Palestinians learn Hebrew in turn, seeing this equality in knowledge as essential to destroying prejudice about Arabs. (“If you can argue, have an argument with an Israeli in Hebrew…it shows that you’re not stupid…”) She is painfully aware that as a Palestinian, and particularly as a refugee, she is stereotyped as uneducated. Interestingly the phrase she chooses, “dumb Arab”, indicates not only lack of ability but muteness, an inability to tell her own story. The stereotypes she encounters and the vulnerability she experiences as a refugee are something that she returns to throughout her storytelling, along with language as a means of self-protection:

Last night at three or four a.m. I woke up hearing the sound of grenades because soldiers, Israeli soldiers, they always come to the camps. Two months ago they killed a nineteen-year-old, a young man, because they – you know, they came in front of his house at two a.m. and they were very loud, so he went out to see what’s happening, so they killed him. They shot him in the arm and it got to his heart, so he died. Jihad Jafari. He was very popular and well known…In the morning I had community service at the children’s rehabilitation centre, and I saw that all the people were in the streets, holding Palestinian flags, wearing the scarves [kuffiyeh], and wearing black. The schools were out, they said, “No school today, we have a martyr.” … So it was – you can see some kind of mourning, and at the same time they were all very angry. Because you feel that the camps are very – you know, soldiers don’t go round to the city [Bethlehem] and take people and shoot them for no reason. The camp, it has no protection of any kind. So we feel very vulnerable and weak and easy to target. And the Palestinian Authority doesn’t do anything about it, of course. And they [soldiers] know – they shot him and they went out and no one asked them where they’re going and what they’re doing, and we end up with a young man dead. And that makes people angry.
With her mention of PA inaction, Amal expresses bitterness that no one challenged the soldiers over what they had done or where they were going, presenting self-defence as a verbal rather than physical act. Interestingly her questions for the departing soldiers mirror the questions she herself is asked at checkpoints, which she repeats several times in her stories. This reversal reinforces her contention that language is an indicator of power. Learning Hebrew as a means of self-defence equips her with the ability to interrogate her interrogators, and to restore some order during chaotic midnight scenes that unfold during army incursions. Her first description of an incursion begins with unidentifiable sounds:

I woke up because of an explosion in my house, and I was like what’s going on. The soldiers came in the middle of the night. They didn’t even knock! If they knocked we would have opened the door, but we were all sleeping, and we were all under fifteen, and they blew up the door with explosions and stuff. So we all woke up, and what’s going on? So the soldiers came in and the glass was all broken, the two doors were exploded, and we were very young and panicking and what’s going on.

Here the glass-shattering explosions are punctuated by Amal’s expression of confusion. The inchoate sounds of the raid are reflected in her earliest perceptions of Hebrew, terrifying and incomprehensible: “I used to see these strangers with guns, speaking…a language I can’t understand…” Her decision to challenge her own fear by learning Hebrew on the basis that soldiers “are probably talking about something very normal” provoked a smile from me, as the image of soldiers exploding the front door in lieu of knocking seemed far from normal. However, it is apparent that Amal sees command of the other’s language as a way to establish some kind of normality, flattening the dips and troughs in the sociopolitical landscape so that she stands on an equality with the soldiers who currently ask, “Where are you going?”, establishing herself as a capable and astute person instead of “a dumb Arab”, and fulfilling her curiosity about Israeli life: “I wanted to know what they say. Like, in general…” For her the dismantling of the barriers that crisscross her life can be partially accomplished through the destruction of the language barrier.

This opening up of new horizons through language is most tangible in the stories related by Budour, Rafael, Rania, and other young people growing up in an integrated milieu, as they are actively creating a new kind of community through their bilingualism. However, two stories from a 10-year-old girl in Aida camp reveals that youth in segregated and materially deprived areas may also view bilingualism as powerful, even if they have little opportunity to learn other languages. In one of the earliest storytelling sessions, which revolved round checkpoints, watchtowers, and walls due to Abed’s fear of being arrested for
drawing the watchtower, Maha described a harrowing trip she and family had made for medical care:

My little brother was born with water on his brain [hydrocephalus]. He has special needs. He doesn’t talk or go to school like the rest of us, and he needs me to take care of him. A little while ago he needed treatment you can’t get here so we took him to the bridge. [Allenby Bridge, the border crossing between Jordan and the occupied West Bank.] It was very difficult, the soldiers didn’t let us through, there was a problem with the papers, or they wouldn’t let us pass for some reason, and my mother was crying and even my father cried. My brother was crying, but not because of what happened, he didn’t understand that. Maybe he was too hot or he was in pain. But they didn’t let us pass that day.

Maha was sitting in a cluster of other children as she told this story. Her voice was soft and she only spoke with encouragement from Huwaida and Nariman, who had their arms round her. Towards the end of the session, when I asked if the children had any more stories they wanted to tell, Maha stood up, apart from the group, and spoke in a much firmer tone.

We were at Allenby and we were taking my brother to that hospital. The Jews didn’t want to let us pass, but I told them they had to. My parents don’t know Hebrew, but I can speak to them all right, and I really told them in Hebrew, I told them [waving a finger], “Don’t you see my brother is sick? He needs to have an operation!” And when they understand that and I explained everything we could go through and take my brother to the doctor before he got even sicker.

Maha speaks no language except Arabic. With this story she does not relate what actually happened, but what she imagines might have happened if she could speak Hebrew. The narrative thread binding the two stories together is a sense of responsibility for her brother: “He needs me to take care of him.” In the story she awakens a similar sense of responsibility in the soldiers by speaking Hebrew, enabling her to cross the border and rework the boundaries of community, with soldiers becoming her co-carers. Use of Hebrew places the boy within the soldiers’ sight: “Don’t you see …?” She simultaneously highlights the injustice of a system that renders certain people invisible, and presents an alternative landscape in which she is heard and her brother seen. Existing violence and the hope of compassion are present in both these stories, and is in several other stories analysed here, the bilingual encounter and various symbols (stones, checkpoints, ID cards) are the points where different possibilities converge.

Throughout the chapter, friction and convergence have emerged as vital themes in young people’s narration of hidden landscapes. The stories that Junayd crafts around a generic sketch of a house, for example, culminate in an imagined visit to an Israeli home; his
stories of army incursions into the camp and the angry response of Aida youth flow into a consideration of what the soldiers’ home life might be like. By focusing closely on young people’s use of language and the sociolinguistic and stylistic elements of their storytelling, this chapter has identified the vocabularies of symbol and metaphor that they draw on consistently in this process. These vocabularies are integral to their narration of community, with stones emerging as particularly strong signifiers of national belonging and political resistance among Palestinian youth. Stories of stone-throwing carry us into places of high friction, such as checkpoints and closed military zones, encouraging us to consider the role of the symbolic lexicon in the halting and transmission of stories across these fault lines. We have seen that many symbols are prominent in the vocabularies of both Israeli and Palestinian youth, but that their meaning shifts; and that symbols held in common can spark curiosity about the other, as well as enabling young people to imagine and narrate social and physical landscapes that lie beyond their sight.

As John Collins observed in his study of collective memory among youth who came of age in the First Intifada (Collins 2004:12), it is common for researchers to equate Palestinian stories with testimony, a conflation that I have noted over the course of my own work and that is also present in scholarly analysis of Israeli stories. Collins argues that this conflation is often a product of the researchers’ own political aims, but he does not appear to consider that it may be an unwitting consequence of focusing on story content without giving due attention to language, stylistics, and form. In recognizing that language is the lifeblood of story and that it is impossible to separate it from content, giving attention to language subverts the documentary model that dominates traditional historical analysis and offers a richer way of interpreting the stories of youth affected by political violence. The identification of the symbolic lexicon and the role of metaphor in young people’s imagining of community are especially significant in this, as the findings cast light on the ways in which creative use of language and stylistic borrowing from other literary genres enable narrators to elucidate lived experience. A body of anthropological literature has already queried the fiction/nonfiction divide, but it chiefly focuses on the practice of literary anthropology, fiction authored by anthropologists that was inspired by fieldwork, or literary or theatrical techniques that can be incorporated into ethnography. (Narayan 1999; Barone 2002) By contrast, this chapter illuminates participants’ own literary approaches to the narration of place and memory, strengthening the existing connection between literary and anthropological work and demonstrating the significance that storytelling as an art form has in young people’s conceptualization of community.
When giving story prompts to young people, I rarely specified a genre or type of story, giving them freedom to relate autobiographical anecdotes or to create fiction as they chose. Interestingly they most often resorted to fairy tale or fable when narrating hidden landscapes, demonstrating a clear socio-political function for these subgenres: to discuss places and people that inspire fear or uncertainty, are experienced as distant, or are perceived as off-limits. Fairy tale, a genre rich in symbol, emerges as a potent way for youth to map out the borders of their community. Wicked witches and plucky resourceful children are two simple fairy tale tropes through which the situation in Israel/Palestine can be understood by the young people, rendering the hidden landscape more predictable. (Conversely, the following chapter on violence in the narration of self and other will examine how symbol can be used as a way to move beyond the fairy tale archetypes of hero and villain.) Fairy tale and fable also enable young people to engage covertly with familial legacies of persecution and resistance that may not be discussed openly in the home, granting access to the landscapes of the past through this creative process of “iconic messaging.” (Wajnryb 2009:265)

Finally, an analysis of bilingualism and the politics of language moves the discussion from the past to the present, with cross-linguistic exchanges and codeswitching once again highlighting the physical, social, and mental fault lines that run across young people’s lives. Whether the separation wall, the playground of a bilingual school, or a bus in which only one language must be spoken, these fault lines all constitute sites of encounter; and as the young people’s stories demonstrate, stories told in and about these liminal spaces often lead to mention of unseen places and the others who populate them. A sociolinguistic map has emerged, inviting us to explore the specific ways in which children manage to rework its borders and to break down or otherwise transform obscuring barriers through storytelling, an analysis that draws attention to storytelling’s violent power and also to the relational ethic at its heart.
Chapter Four – Violence in the Narration of Self and Other

Face to face: the fundamental violence of storytelling

Storytelling’s ability “to therapeutically and symbolically connect the self both to others and to the persona of the storyteller” (Carabas and Harter 2005:150) means that it has come to hold a prominent place in grassroots peace work in Israel/Palestine. Typified by Seeds of Peace, a large-scale organization that runs peace education programs for Palestinian and Israeli youth that are centred on joint summer camps in the United States, narrative-focused peace groups aim to “humanize the other and legitimize their collective narratives” through face-to-face contact in the belief that intergenerational conflict can be most effectively addressed through individual relationships. (Hammack 2011:79) While critics have noted that narrative approaches to understanding conflict may inflict further violence on marginalized groups, as emphasizing personal stories or even collective narratives can disguise the structural nature of political violence and suggest a false parity between oppressor and oppressed (Dugard 1997; Rouhana 2004), little attention has been given to storytelling’s potential to generate fresh violence, or to the violence inherent in storytelling itself. Although storytelling’s capacity to foster empathy in situations of intractable conflict is not in doubt, as it has been well-documented across a body of literature on peace education, transitional justice, and community psychology, it cannot be conflated with reconciliation, as “it may just as trenchantly exaggerate differences, foment discord, and do violence to lived experience.” (Jackson 2002:11) Yet the principal academic debates on narrative violence in conflict situations tend to focus heavily on truth commissions, in which storytelling is built into the national reconciliation process in a clearly defined and thereby heavily circumscribed form (testimony). To date there have been no full studies on narrative violence in the everyday interactions between people living with intractable conflict, and only limited discussion of violence in narrative-based grassroots peace initiatives; storytelling in these contexts is presented as almost exclusively reconciliatory or therapeutic.

Moving beyond the debates on the value and validity of personal stories as a public response to political injustice, which characterizes critiques of the truth and reconciliation commissions (Hamber, Nageng, and O’Malley 2000; Ross 2003; Weine 2006), this chapter analyses narrative violence as it emerges in the everyday lives of young people in Israel/Palestine, focusing on school, home, and public space. As some of the teenagers in the study are part of youth encounter groups or other coexistence projects, youth-focused peace initiatives that involve storytelling are also considered. My fieldwork revealed multiple facets
of narrative violence – the face-to-face relation, erasure, partition, the breaching of boundaries, and the burden of listener expectations – that I will discuss in turn, beginning with oral storytelling’s requirement for a listener, a face-to-face relationship. This relationship is always charged with the electric possibility of violence (discussed in more detail later, in relation to a young Palestinian’s fear that interrogating soldiers would burn her face) and a thorough analysis of this phenomenon and its implications is essential to our understanding of how young people in Israel/Palestine imagine and narrate community. It may also encourage more astute and effective uses of storytelling in situations of intractable asymmetric conflict.

In his analysis of the human face as an ethical imperative, Emanuel Levinas captures the vulnerability and latent violence that mark the face-to-face relationship. As intersubjectivity and understanding consciousness are its primary concerns, Levinas’s phenomenological approach tessellates with the methodology and analytical tools that I have adopted in this study: Story Theory, a method of eliciting stories that emphasizes the relationship between self and others; and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which prioritizes lived experience and how people make sense of their experiences. These choices were guided by my own understanding of storytelling as a phenomenon that brings the first, second, and third person into a relationship, creating an intersubjective space in which the teller’s experience is made available to the Other through narrative. Levinas’s work on violence, which stresses the metaphor of the face, provides a consistent framework for discussing the potential for violence that is generated by storytelling:

A thing can never be presented personally and ultimately has no identity. Violence is applied to the thing, it seizes and disposes of the thing. Things give, they do not offer a face…The face, for its part, is inviolable; those eyes, which are absolutely without protection, the most naked part of the human body, none the less offer an absolute resistance to possession, an absolute resistance in which the temptation to murder is inscribed: the temptation of absolute negation…This temptation to murder and this impossibility of murder constitute the very vision of the face. To see a face is already to hear ‘You shall not kill’, and to hear ‘You shall not kill’ is to hear ‘Social justice’. (Levinas 1990:8)

The resistance to possession that distinguishes the face-to-face relationship, and by natural extension the storytelling relationship, assumes particular significance and strength in a region where a struggle is being waged not only over territory but civil rights, memory, and the right to narrate. The use of an analytical framework informed by the philosophy of Levinas itself raises questions about that right, as in an interview following the massacres of
Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila in 1982, Levinas rejected the suggestion that Palestinians might be understood as by Israelis as the Other: “My definition of the other is completely different…[I]n alterity we can find an enemy, or at least then we are faced the problem of knowing who is right and who is wrong. There are people who are wrong.” (Hand 2001:294) This response, which elides the question of universal responsibility for the Other that dominates his philosophical work, suggests that Palestinians lie outside that ‘we’; at worst they are a perpetual enemy, at best they stimulate discussion over culpability (as opposed to responsibility). Alterity is recast in such a way as to exclude Palestinian faces. Given this act of erasure, it may seem like an act of narrative violence to read the stories of Palestinian youth through Levinas’s lens. However, the potency of his work on violence and intersubjectivity lies with the metaphor of the face itself, not his political views on the state and its security; therefore I agree with Judith Butler that the most powerful way to respond to this ethical contradiction is “to think with Levinas against Levinas” (Butler 2012) as we consider how “resistance to possession” is manifested through face-to-face storytelling. A diary entry written by a Bethlehem schoolgirl during the Second Intifada, dealing with an interrogation, encapsulates that resistance:

One of the soldiers asked me to go with him to see the captain. I was so frightened and thought, “What do they want from ME?” When I arrived in the place where he was waiting for me, I was shocked to see many soldiers. I wasn’t able to say a word. He told me that my name was Dana and that I was 16 years old. He asked me about my father and I told them that I didn’t know where he was. I was saying “I don’t know” to all their questions, and that’s when they threatened to burn my face or demolish the house. (Atallah and van Teeffelen 2004:66)

Dana lacks the narrative power to name herself in this exchange (she is told who she is by her interrogator, while the reality of arbitrary child arrest under martial rule is a continual reminder of what she is) and fear leaves her wordless. Although she could not protest verbally, the face-to-face relation is enough in itself to make her resistance felt, which is why the first focus of the soldiers’ threat is her face.

Two stories from my fieldwork explore this resistance in more depth. The first was told by 15-year-old Budour, a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship who lives in Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom. She recounts an event from her mother’s childhood in the 1960s, when Palestinian citizens of Israel were still under martial law:

My mother’s memories from the army are very bad and sad. I remember she’s told me stories that they used to come in the house and look for her father because he had these books from Lebanon, only that they were published in Lebanon, not that they
were anti-Israel – you know, just published there. So they came and they took the books and they wanted to hit him and I remember she told me, really, like – she [pause] she lay on him and they hit her instead.

Regarding family stories and wider Palestinian history, Budour repeated several times in a group storytelling workshop, “We carry these things.” A contrast emerges here between the army’s treatment of the books, a tangible cultural and linguistic heritage, and the image of people carrying stories. As physical objects, the books could be destroyed; the stories cannot be confiscated, as they are inseparable from their tellers. Budour’s summary of her often challenging conversations with other students at her high school, who are all Jewish except for a small number of Arab teenagers from Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom, illustrate this point: “They have to listen now because they know I’m not going away.” She described her first day at school:

They all looked at me and the other kids from Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom, especially the Arabs, like we were aliens. They just gathered around us and were like, “No, what, you are Arab and you were born here and not in Gaza?” And what, they just, what, they didn’t know what we were…

In the first years…the only time we spoke to them was when we had an argument, and you couldn’t really say your opinion, because there were so many kids with the same opinion that they were taught to think, so you would say something, just a little word, and they would jump and start yelling, and so, so many people around you are just yelling at you and you don’t know what to do and you haven’t even completed your sentence.

Although frustration, fear, and a strong feeling of being suppressed are present in Budour’s story, which was delivered in one long and rushed sentence that conveyed a sense of suffocation, it is clear that her presence in the classroom is a story in its own right. She destabilizes her classmates’ conception of community by interrupting the stories on which it rests, stories in which Arabs are not born here, but in Gaza. As most schools in Israel are segregated on ethnic lines, the refusal of her classmates to listen to what she had to say could be read as their attempt to retain some familiarity in an uncertain situation. However, in a vivid example of Levinas’ paradox (the urge to negate the Other and her story, paired with the impossibility of such a negation) the other students emerge from the story as curious in spite of their unwillingness to listen. This paradox is summed up in the face-to-face relation: “They all looked at me.”

The perception of Palestinians as the embodiment of unfamiliar and disturbing stories was articulated clearly by 18-year-old Noga, a resident of an Orthodox Jewish settlement in Gush Etzion, as she discussed the Nakba.
It’s a sad story for them, but we didn’t have a choice, and I think that even if not everything was justified, they make it worse instead of solving problems. The refugees, the only Palestinians – the only refugees from 1948 that live now [as refugees] are Palestinians, because all the other refugees in that time, like Jews for example in many countries, just built homes in other places. So when they talk about the Nakba I think it’s too, still, they want to bring back the past. [Pause] You can’t keep being stuck in the 1948 war. They’re still refugees, I think only the Palestinians keep being refugees, and they give it to their children and their grandchildren.

Noga identifies a conception of the self as refugee as an intrinsic and even unique part of modern Palestinian identity, echoing Budour’s comment: “The Nakba, we carry it.” It is also reminiscent of 12-year-old Junayd’s explanation for why he would not choose to leave Aida refugee camp permanently: “I would always come back to look at the wall. If I left I might forget what they did to us, and that would be like forgetting me.” According to Noga, in “giving it to their children and their grandchildren” – phrasing that treats history as a possession – Palestinians “bring back the past”, with the result that Palestinian experiences of political violence in 1948 are made present for Noga too, embodied by Palestinians themselves. Forbidden history is invoked by the presence of the other, presence that is epitomized in Levinas’ thought by the face-to-face relationship.

Her initial reaction to the Nakba, which I raised during a word association activity, was hostile: “That word makes me feel antagonized because it’s not the real history.” This idea of real histories versus fictional histories will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter, but here the use of the adjective ‘real’ is noteworthy for what it says about Noga’s vivid but frequently contradictory conceptualization of Palestinians themselves. As Noga perceives the Nakba as a state of being rather than as just a historical event – “Palestinians keep being refugees, and they give it to their children” – an admission of antagonism towards the word brings her into confrontation with the people who embody that word for her. It is also significant that Noga, who identifies as being from a right-wing religious background, consistently uses the word ‘Palestinian’ where her peers might say ‘Arab’; this may be read as a subtle affirmation of Palestinian peoplehood. Her speech is hesitant, with frequent pauses, and she moves between seemingly contradictory associations: the Nakba as “not the real history”, but also “a sad story for them” in which “we didn’t have a choice.” In her self-identification with the pre-state Jewish paramilitary forces, Noga links herself to the events she is obliquely referencing, hinting that the Nakba is not simply “a story for them” but also a story for her. She finally qualifies her response with, “If you think like a
Palestinian, if you are a Palestinian, it was real.” The empathy in this ‘if’ appears to be in tension with the earlier declaration of antagonism, generating a feeling of uncertainty.

This uncertainty is another vital component of the face-to-face relationship that is central to oral storytelling, a relationship that “realizes in the extreme an abandonment of the certainties and imperialisms of the self” and exemplifies Levinas’ understanding of the ethical imperative as “instability itself: the instability of the naked relation to the Other.” (Wall 1999:31) As I listened to Budour’s stories of her experiences at an almost exclusively Jewish high school and witnessed the hesitation of Noga and many other young narrators as they considered shadowy alternative histories, I became aware of a tension in the Story Theory methodology. As discussed in Chapter 2, Story Theory hinges on three interrelated concepts: intentional dialogue, self-in-relation, and creating ease. Intentional dialogue is defined as “purposeful engagement with another”, which initiates “an active process of recognizing self as related with others in a story plot.” Finally, “ease is created in the midst of accepting the whole story as one’s own.” (Smith and Liehr 2014:225) This third defining characteristic of storytelling seemed to conflict with the disquieting and fundamentally disruptive encounter with the Other that is central to the face-to-face relationship, and by extension the concept of self-in-relation, which is predicated on the idea that “self is created in relation to others.” (Hall and Allen 1991:112)

However, for young people who live with ongoing political violence, “accepting the whole story as one’s own” is rarely possible. The possibility of such acceptance decreases as the level of personal risk increases: while Palestinian youth living under martial law had complex and ambivalent stories to tell, stories that often revealed undercurrents of curiosity about the ‘other’ community and empathy for its constituents, they were far less likely to identify the contradictions and uncertainties in their own narratives and raise them for discussion than were Palestinian youth who hold Israeli citizenship and have minimal contact with soldiers. Budour, although unequivocally critical of the army, was acutely aware of the fears and sense of psychological besiegement that haunt many of her Jewish peers, and she reflected sensitively on how her growing awareness of their experiences had transformed the way she sees her classmates. “I felt that the purpose of people going to the army was because they really want only war and they hate Arabs and they want them to die. Now I understand that it’s something bigger.”

Palestinian participants who encounter army violence on a regular basis, particularly in the Old City of Hebron and the refugee camp Aida, struggled to reconcile their own experiences with the army with empathy towards individual soldiers in any explicit way. 17-
year-old Mahmoud, from Hebron, opened our interview by pointing to a soldier in the nearby watchtower and saying, “If I got the chance I would kill him.” Later he described befriending young Israelis over Facebook (“I have at least ten or twelve Israeli friends. It is only the soldiers we hate”) and travelling illegally to Jerusalem to meet them (“Sometimes I even climb the wall”). When asked if his friends would be conscripted that year, he replied, “Yes. I tell them to be kind.” Mahmoud apparently did not register the tension between his wish to kill the soldier in the watchtower, his hatred for soldiers, and his belief that his friends should accept conscription. He did not appear to have imagined refusal as a possibility for his friends. I asked no further questions to encourage him to try and integrate these aspects of his story, recognizing that by treating his Facebook friends as distinct from other soldiers, who represent oppression and suffering that he details minutely through his stories of camp life, Mahmoud enables himself to remain friends with them. Ease cannot be created through pressing the storyteller to openly accept and find a way to piece together all the apparently mismatching fragments of a story when this fragmentation is currently a safe way (and perhaps the only way) for the teller to negotiate a precarious life.

Storytelling in this context offers no neat endings and no resolutions. But even if storytellers cannot reach ease through explicitly claiming ownership of all the disparate and discordant elements that make up the story, a different form of ease is created through storytelling’s fundamental instability. Through the inherent violence and vulnerability of the face-to-face relation, and the paradox set out by Levinas, storytelling creates a space where ambivalence is accepted and even expected. This suggests that storytelling may have liberating potential for young people growing up with intractable conflict, as it creates a cultural space of exception in which they have the right to be uncertain and conflicted, a specific vulnerability that nationalized collective narratives do not permit. This leads us to a consideration of the experiences of young people in peace organizations that employ storytelling in their work, how this possibility is realized or suppressed through the different story methods that are used, and the impact that narrative-based planned encounters for peace have on young people’s sense of self and community.

**Storytelling as self-expression and suppression in planned encounters for peace**

In order to understand the role that narrative-based peace projects play in the everyday lives of young people in Israel/Palestine, it is important to know the context in which they emerged. A recent appraisal of the efficacy of face-to-face peace programs in Israel/Palestine over the last twenty years identifies four main models or approaches, of which the
Narrative/Storytelling Model is the most recent. (Maoz 2011) Devised in the late 1990s in response to demonstrated weaknesses in other models,

[It] combines interpersonal interaction with interaction through group identities, subsequently combining the formation of personal ties with discussions of the conflict and of power relations. It is based on the assumption that, in order to reach reconciliation, groups in intractable conflicts must work through their unresolved pain and anger through storytelling. Encountering the experience and suffering of the other through storytelling is seen as enabling the conflicting groups to create intergroup trust and compassion by re-humanizing, and constructing a more complex image of, each other. (Maoz 2011:120)

This approach was developed by Israeli psychologist Dan Bar-On, whose background is apparent in the quasi-clinical language of “working through.” Storytelling is offered almost as a treatment with an expected outcome; little attention has been paid to the destabilizing possibilities of narrative discussed above. Recognizing the limitations that the pervasive idea of narrative as therapy may place on storytellers, not least by casting them in the role of traumatized subject, also means critically revisiting the methodologies underpinning this study. Story Theory was devised in a nursing setting and IPA originated in the field of psychology, so the conceptions of narrative that inform this project are closely bound up with healthcare. In conclusion to this chapter I will discuss how the scope of young people’s storytelling in conflict zones may be broadened by shifting focus from the idea of storytelling as therapy to the content of the stories themselves, chiefly the depiction of the other and the significance of such representations in the tellers’ understanding (and potential remapping) of community. This shift enables us to retain the person-centred relational values that characterize storytelling’s therapeutic function, while expanding its horizons to include young people’s political participation in community-building. It also has significant implications for our understanding of narrative violence and its liberating potential, as it allows teller and listener new ways of relating.

The Storytelling Model not only draws on the tradition of narrative as therapy but on the three models of face-to-face contact that preceded it. The Coexistence Model emphasizes “widely shared and noncontroversial commonalities such as ‘we are all human beings’”, while the Joint Projects Model aims to foster a common identity in participants by inviting them to work together towards a superordinate goal. (Maoz 2011) Meanwhile, the Confrontational Model is concerned with the power asymmetries that mark the conflict, challenging Israeli Jewish participants to come to an awareness of their role as the dominant group. While these three models have cantonized the personal and political to a strong
degree, with the former two focusing almost exclusively on individual experience and the third examining systemic oppression, the Narrative/Storytelling Model aims to weave personal and political together, encouraging an awareness of the humanity of the Other while still remaining attentive to structural inequalities. The Coexistence and Joint Project Models remain the most widely used, constituting 60% of all encounter programs, while the Confrontational and Narrative Models are implemented by 34% of programs. (Maoz 2011)

It is difficult to discuss storytelling approaches in isolation from the coexistence-orientated models, partly because encounter programs frequently incorporate elements from other models while retaining one core approach, but mostly because the Coexistence Model was the backdrop against which all the others emerged and as such it continues to overshadow young people’s experiences of planned contact programs. Developed in the USA and brought to Israel/Palestine in the 1980s, it is at the heart of one of the largest and most far-reaching encounter projects in the region, Seeds of Peace. Rania, a 15-year-old Palestinian girl with Israeli citizenship who attends the bilingual Yad b’Yad school in Jerusalem, was a participant in the Seeds of Peace summer camp in Maine. She describes her experiences of storytelling within this framework:

I really liked it. It was different...Every day we had dialogues, like two hours of dialogues, and I was – I was – at first I wasn’t really nervous but when I saw that it’s like, really – it’s hard being in dialogue because everyone is fighting and everything, so it was like really hard for me. But then, like, I think the last dialogue was really good. We learned how to talk...We shared stories and everything, like everyone shared their own story from where they live and stuff they’ve been through, so everyone was listening and respecting...There were stories that were like really hard to hear, mostly from the Palestinian side. My stories were not that hard because I don’t live there and I don’t go through these things every day, but this stuff is still really important for me. My stories were not that sad or hard. I shared stories about – one story that I got on the bus one time, from school, I went home, and it was a few years ago when we had these school T-shirts, so everyone could know that we were from Hand in Hand and like there were people not that happy about it. So – some boy, he was cursing me, and saying lots of rude things, and I was ignoring it, and then when he went to get off the bus he spat on me. And I was like, what. And I was with two of my friends, and they were Jews, so he only spat on me...And no one on the bus did anything, except for my friends, but not the driver or anyone on the bus, like, they didn’t do anything or ask anything. So that was the story I told. It made me feel really bad, humiliated.

Rania identifies storytelling as a way of “learning to talk” and establishing respect within the group. The transformative power that this story-based dialogue session held for her is demonstrated in her retelling of the event: her sentences became more fluent and detailed, with fewer pauses and filler words such as ‘um’ and ‘like’, and for the first time in our
conversation she describes an emotional state. (“It made me feel really bad, humiliated.”)
Before she recounted this specific story, she compared it to the stories of Palestinians living
under military rule – “My stories are not that sad or hard” – and explained that the stories are
nonetheless important to her, a qualification hinting that she felt her experiences might be
considered less worth hearing than a story told by a teenager living in more difficult
circumstances. It appears that the Seeds of Peace storytelling group was able to reduce this
fear for her, as “everyone shared their own story…everyone was listening and respecting.”
The range of stories told in the group helped Rania to feel more comfortable in telling her
own. She also notes that the combative atmosphere of previous workshops dissipated as the
stories were told, giving her courage to take part. Storytelling emerges as a way to create an
environment conducive to self-expression as well as being the means of self-expression.

It is significant that the storytelling group was the last session of the camp. Prior to
this, the storytellers participated in a three-week program designed to alter their self-concept,
which places this final activity in a different light. The opening ritual for the camp, itself
based around story, captures the changes that the facilitators hope to make in how the youth
perceive themselves:

Each delegation is escorted from the bus to the lawn overlooking the lake, in which
they are told the origin story of Seeds of Peace…They are also introduced to the
narrative of the new cultural system in which they will be (re)socialized. Bobbie [a
Seeds of Peace cofounder] tells them: “When you drove into Maine, when you
crossed that border, there was a big sign. Did anybody see the sign? It said on it,
‘Maine, the way life should be.’ At camp, we try to make this a reality for you. So
after tonight, you’ll all be wearing the same green Seeds of Peace T-shirt. This is very
important, because it shows that you’re all equal. Everybody at camp is equal. All of
you with each other, even with the staff. There is no inequality here.”

At camp, the “difference” of identity undergoes an attempted erasure through
a radical restructuring of social ecology. Underlying this attempt is, most clearly, a
liberal American cultural model that relies on a humanist ethic of identity pluralism:
identity diversity is worthy of reciprocal respect, and it is the environments of youth
that polarize them. (Hammack 2011:69)

This welcome reveals how coexistence-orientated programs that emphasize noncontroversial
commonalities at the expense of differences may restrict young people’s ability to express
themselves through story. Before they are invited to tell their own stories, the narrators are
urged to see themselves (and consequently to narrate themselves) in a fundamentally different
way, not as Israelis or Palestinians but as ‘Seeds’ (they are addressed as such during camp).
This metaphor suggests that they are in the most basic stage of growth, requiring adult
nurturing. Having been asked to bring something that represented her heritage, Rania had
packed a traditional Palestinian scarf, but the camp’s uniform policy meant that she could not choose when to wear it and that it was only brought out for a specific activity. This effort to blot out perceptible indicators of difference in a quest to create a new story can itself be read as a form of narrative violence, as can the camp’s emphasis on the equality of all participants. Palestinian youth, especially those living under military law, do not experience equality in their daily lives; and by implying that it is possible to erase asymmetries in power by holding the summer camp in Maine, as though their influence is no longer felt beyond Israeli airspace, the program also underestimates the effect they have on young people as well as erasing part of Palestinian experience. In Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom, Budour punctuated her stories with, “We carry these things”; the tacit message in the Seeds of Peace welcome ritual is that these things can be put aside with today’s T-shirt. Secondly, the repeated affirmations of their equal status may make it more difficult for both Israeli and Palestinian youth to tell stories that accurately reflect how they live, or else diminish the impact of such stories when they are told, as they are being encouraged to treat equality as an ontological condition rather than a political right that is routinely denied.

Rania does not explicitly address this tension between the Coexistence Model that is at the core of Seeds of Peace’s work and the organization’s inclusion of narrative-based activities. She does, however, tell a story that epitomizes it. At Ben-Gurion Airport, as the only Arab in a group of Jewish teenagers from Yad b’Yad, Rania was taken aside for further questioning:

They kept asking me why I’m with [the Jewish students] and then they opened my bag and they found the hatta [Palestinian scarf]. I brought it because Seeds for Peace asked us to bring something from like heritage. And the security kept me for a long time because of the hatta, they wanted to know why I had that hatta.

For Rania, the hatta does not just symbolize Palestinian heritage; it is a tangible reminder of her difference in the eyes of state officials. At camp, she was required not to wear the hatta as an expression of the camp’s egalitarian spirit, which treats the scarf itself as a divisive and potentially dangerous object. “But like it’s not really about a hatta, they [airport security] held me up because I’m Arab.” By insisting that equality within the camp is a reality, the organizers unwittingly negate stories that end with that because.

Interestingly, despite its efforts to restructure notions of identity and belonging within the camp itself, Seeds of Peace participants arrive in twin delegations that are organized according to national group. Uneasiness over such binary groupings was expressed by several young people in this study, who were conscious of falling outside the categories in some way
or not matching popular expectations about what they ‘should’ be like as a member of a particular group. This ambiguity formed a poignant theme in the stories that were told, highlighting a common dilemma faced by Palestinians with Israeli citizenship that also has relevance for Israeli Jews of Arab origin, as the narrators consciously positioned themselves on the borders between communities. bell hooks identifies such marginal spaces as “the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance…a radical perspective to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.” (hooks 1990) This image recurs across recent literature on cultural geography, which tends to emphasize the permeability of borders over their impenetrability. Echoing hooks: “[The border] is a paradoxical zone of resistance, agency, and rogue embodiment.” (Kumar Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007:ix) Demonstrating the form that such resistance and rogue embodiment might take: “Things that cross the border undermine the border’s authority and have the capacity to ‘pollute’ the inside that the border is trying to protect.” (Haddad 2007:119) Anthropologically informed research that applies concepts of taboo and pollution to border studies has sharp relevance to storytelling in conflict zones: as we have seen, when understood in phenomenological terms stories traverse the boundaries between first, second, and third person, and consequently between the subjective and the objective, private space and public space, the personal and the shared. It is the association between pollution and danger (and subsequently violence) makes the stories of young narrators who situate themselves on a boundary particularly interesting here, as their stories may be read as threats to national or other collective understandings of self and other.

However, as Lila Abu-Lughod warns, “there is a tendency to romanticize resistance, to read all forms of resistance as a sign of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated.” (Abu-Lughod 2009) This romanticism is evident in scholarly definitions of borders that emphasize the creative violence that ‘polluting’ individuals may do to borders and conceptions of nation (by breaching them) over the destructive violence that borders may do to individuals even once a breach has been made: refugees who undermine a border as per Haddad’s conception may yet find themselves in detention centres or subjected to harsh immigration laws, for example. While borders can be sites of creativity, they are also symbols of wider structures of oppression and containment; in this context to write as though the former can counterbalance or even outweigh the latter is to obfuscate young Israeli and Palestinian narrators’ experiences of marginalization on the basis of their youth, which is a vital part of their stories.
The use of the border concept to define young people’s experiences and to organize them into a particular narrative is not only apparent in the way that narrative-based encounter groups rely on an ethno-national binary to categorize participants, but in how participants are encouraged to relate to their geographical environment. I was invited to attend the inaugural activity for a new cohort of twelve-year-old participants at Kids4Peace, a Jerusalem-based peace education program that is hosted on premises owned by the American consulate. As with Seeds of Peace, a summer camp in the USA is a lynchpin; the first year of the program is named Camp4Peace in reflection of its importance. The camps are held at multiple locations in the USA, and on arrival for their first meeting, participants were divided into groups named after their host cities – ‘Boston group’, ‘Seattle group’, etc. – that will form their smaller Kids4Peace community for the coming year. After this initial dislocation, in which youth from Jerusalem and its environs were organized into groups named for distant cities and taught the English-language camp song, the first activity began, entitled ‘Mapping Me and My Community’. Young people sat in small groups to discuss with a facilitator (sometimes an adult employee, usually an older peer counsellor) how they perceived and interacted with Jerusalem. As I moved from group to group, it became clear that the primary aim was not to gain an understanding of how the young people see Jerusalem, but to correct geographical misperceptions. Many youth were unfamiliar with the city’s layout and could not pinpoint Jewish and Arab areas in relation to one another. One Palestinian boy with Jerusalem residency, on being asked where his neighbourhood of Beit Safafa is located, replied, “In the city centre.” The adult facilitator replied, “No, it’s a long way out from the centre, it’s nearer to Bethlehem.” Rather than exploring the boy’s personal geography of Jerusalem, in which his home is at the heart of the city (or in which Jewish Jerusalem is perceived as peripheral), the facilitator was more concerned with helping young people to assemble a physically accurate map. The imposition of these narrative parameters is a subtle form of “doing violence to lived experience” (Jackson 2002:11), as the youth’s own stories of the city were constrained by the educational objective.

At the session’s conclusion, a number of youth demonstrated resistance to that objective. After being invited to share what they had learnt, they began to give the addresses of recommended waffle bars and pizza places. More explicit and increasingly exasperated questions from facilitators (“We know about the waffles, but did you learn anything about people from another community that you hadn’t known before today?”) were met with laughter and more commentary on food, with group members acting as though they were unaware of what was expected of them. This reticence may be read as lack of trust (although
who was most mistrusted, adult facilitators or new peers from the ‘other’ community, was unclear), an assertion of their own power in the face of adult expectations, or desire to establish connections with one another through apolitical pizza tastes and the rather more political group defiance of the adults present. Having undergone a process of dislocation and disorientation, in which they were organized into groups named after American cities and the boundaries of their neighbourhoods as they see them were redrawn according to the municipal maps, youth had to find a different standpoint from which to view the city and narrate their experiences. Fast food outlets, ubiquitous in young people’s lives and across the city, may have seemed like a logical option.

Several older participants, who expressed discomfort at being categorized according to ethno-national group and who reported frustration at the restrictions placed on them by planned encounter groups, located themselves on a border of some kind through their own storytelling. Although borders function as tools of partition and classification, even in coexistence-orientated encounter programs, they simultaneously afford more complex ideas of belonging. They constitute the edge of each category, and through their storytelling, young people who position themselves on the boundaries either sharpen that delineation or work to blur it, rendering the border a place where “inside and outside merge.” (Haddad 2007:120)

Here we return to the concepts of purity and pollution that were discussed earlier in relation to borders, now applying them specifically to narrative.

**Purity in narrative: storytelling as transgressing boundaries**

Establishing any barrier means acknowledging the possibility of a breach, in which “the danger from outside threatens to penetrate the safe inside.” Borders are also inextricably entwined with the lives of refugees, as “the border is that which ensures [refugees’] existence. Were there no borders, there would be no refugees.” (Haddad 2007:121) In the world of modern nation-states, refugees, migrants, and stateless persons have become pollutants, as “they blur national (read: natural) boundaries.” (Malkki 1993:7) The Israeli state has enacted a new categorical order through the use of colour-coded identity cards that divide the Palestinian population into subgroups: citizens, permanent residents of East Jerusalem, Palestinians from the West Bank, and Palestinians from Gaza, with each card carrying different legal and civil rights. For West Bank and Gaza residents, the identity cards are supplemented by permits that grant the holder temporary passage to Israel on certain dates and using specified roads and checkpoints. In military parlance the term ‘sterile’ is routinely used to describe an area that has been cleared of people, reinforcing the image of the stateless
Palestinians as pollutants who must be contained by this labyrinthine system of walls, checkpoints, and paperwork. The testimonies of current and former Israeli soldiers, gathered through the grassroots Israeli veterans’ organization Breaking the Silence, demonstrate how Palestinian spaces are defined and their inhabitants controlled through the ideas of sterility and pollution:

Someone comes along, he passes, you check his ID. The real inspection should take place on the other side, making sure he really went through and didn’t stay inside… There’s the enclave of the hotel and the beach…It was an enclave in the sense that it had to be a sterile area. Palestinians were allowed to move around there, but not stay. They pass through. It’s a transit area. (Testimony 240827, Breaking the Silence)

Anything that’s not ‘sterile’ is suspect. (Testimony 135217, Breaking the Silence 2014)

Beyond the point where the soldier is standing, the road is ‘sterile,’ off-limits to Palestinians. Which includes what? It includes that they don’t talk to you. You talk to them. You tell them what to do. Whoever talks, you say, “Shut up! I don’t want to know.” Because they’re always telling you about their family and whatever, saying, “I need to work and I need to…” You don’t care—“Shut up, sit!” and so they lose…I take their ID, and it’s gone. “Sit here, you won’t want to not be here when I get back.” They’re always there when you get back. No one goes anywhere without his ID. (Testimony 570995, Breaking the Silence)

Sterility means more than emptying or tightly regulating a space. It involves silencing its inhabitants, as the third testifying soldier makes clear. In this context stories themselves are pollutants and storytelling an act of political transgression. As discussed in the first chapter, permits and identity cards have been incorporated into the lexicon of symbols that Palestinian youth frequently use in storytelling; and as they often feature in stories in which the protagonists travel illegally or fool soldiers into believing that they are someone else, they are imbued with a quasi-folkloric quality – they have become signifiers of a trickster tale. 16-year-old Yara, the daughter of a Palestinian mother and a Dutch father, described passing herself off as a tourist:

When I was little it was really different, because I could go with only the Dutch passport and show them that with my father I’m Dutch, so I could pass…but now I’m like all the people here, I should have a permit …Once – do you know what’s the TELF? It’s an exam in French and they give you a certificate. So all the girls who did this exam, we went to Jerusalem with the nun who teaches us. And I didn’t have a permit, so I brought my father with me. He had his passport, and my father – he always wants to show everything. He wants to show his visa, his name, everything… So I told him, “No, Father, don’t do this, because if they see you have a visa they’re going to ask me for one.” The soldier told him pass, and then I came. I don’t have a
visa and neither do I have a permit, so I just showed him the passport, like this. He said, “Show me the visa.” So my father had a think and something told him, like, tell him I don’t understand. So the soldiers asked us where’s the visa, and my father told them, “She’s my daughter.” The soldiers were like yes, but where’s the visa. “I don’t understand, I don’t hear you!” he told them. [Laughter] So they told him another time, where’s the visa, and “I don’t understand, I can’t hear you!” So the soldier got fed up and he let us pass.

The absence of a visa and entry stamp reveals that Yara is a Palestinian with a foreign passport, which military law forbids her to use in Israel/Palestine. Her white father’s presence encourages the soldiers to perceive Yara as a tourist in spite of her darker colouring, enabling her to ‘pass’ in both the literal and figurative sense. After relating the trick, she describes a crossing that she tried to make with her mother. While the first story demonstrated the ingenuity of a marginalized person in outwitting the army, in classic trickster tradition, the second focuses on powerlessness and humiliation:

There was another time when I didn’t have a permit and I tried to go with my mother. I was wearing jeans with these kind of metal things, studs, and I rang the alarm when I was going through the metal detector. So it rang and I had to take off my pants, but I couldn’t, like how can I take off my pants in public? They told me to go back. I was crying and my mother, she said a few nasty words to the soldiers and then they told her to go back. So we went back.

Yara repeats the same phrase three times: “They told me to go back”, “They told her to go back”, “We went back.” This echoes the soldiers’ exasperated “Where’s the visa?” in her trickster story, which she also repeats three times. The similarity in structure underscores the difference in outcome. Narrated in succession, the two stories communicate the unpredictable nature of life on the border: on one day Yara is read as a white foreigner, on another she becomes a local Palestinian. While her Dutch passport sometimes allows her to elude the “categorical order” imposed on Palestinians by the army, the checkpoint’s own categories have coloured Yara’s narrative of her family, so that her father is associated with security while she identifies her mother as a source of danger. The sterile space is disturbed by a Palestinian woman who talks back, putting others around her at risk of retaliation:

With my dad, I feel much safer – like, with my mum, I know her, when I set off this metal detector, she started to say nasty words and to say bad things about the soldiers and about Israel, it scared me, and I don’t want her – like, if they – they can put a black dot on her name so she can’t pass the checkpoint, and if they do that to her they will do it to me. So with my dad, nothing happens, I just pass and I feel free and safe.
In none of her stories does Yara confront the army directly. She depicts herself as outwitting them, crossing unseen (“These days the soldiers are sleeping, so you can just go”), or if necessary complying with permit regulations, but she is afraid to be known as disobedient and is fearful over her mother’s public boundary-breaching. Yara shared stories about life in the home, but kept coming back to the checkpoint to illustrate the differences in her parents’ temperament and behaviour. It is the checkpoint that led her to consider from an early age what it means to be biracial (an accepted outsider or a suspicious outsider according to the perception of the soldier on duty), thereby helping her to forge her own sense of self as well as shaping her relationships with her family. Borders and barriers are at the crux of her self-concept.

Another participant who occupies a similarly ambiguous position is 15-year-old Rafael, an Israeli Jewish boy whose paternal grandparents immigrated from Austria and Poland and whose maternal grandparents come from Yemen. He lives in an affluent Jewish area of Jerusalem and attends Yad b’Yad. He is also a peer counsellor at the coexistence-focused youth group Kids4Peace:

Most of the time at Kids4Peace when people come, or even in the school, and you say, “Let’s play a game. Guess who’s Arab and who’s Jewish” – and every single time, people say, “Well, you look Arab.” They say to me that I look Arab, and then they’re completely surprised and shocked when I say I’m Jewish.

As he has attended Yad b’Yad from preschool, Rafael is fluent in Arabic and Hebrew, something that is rare for Jewish teenagers. “It’s easier for Arabs to learn Hebrew. It’s all around them, even if they go to the mall, they have to learn it to survive in this society.” His bilingualism, combined with his physical appearance, encourages people to see him as Arab. He shared this story of mistaken identity at the beginning of the interview, establishing himself as a Jewish narrator. But as the interview progressed, his narrative voice altered. He used neutral third person pronouns when referring to both Arabs and Jews, notably shifting from ‘they’ to a more intimate ‘we’ when speaking about the Holocaust. At other points he used the first person plural in such an ambiguous way that it is difficult to judge which community he was referencing, his classmates as a whole or his Jewish peers specifically. The final story he told was of his maternal grandparents’ journey from Yemen, which he concluded by describing his family as Arab:

Until a year ago I would have considered myself an Austro-Yemenite… [Laughs] I have a very weird family, you know, half of it being [pause] Arab, I would even consider. Say you’re from Morocco or Iraq, then considering yourself and the family
as coming from an Arab state or country isn’t completely politically correct here, but actually Yemen is [Arab]. I mean, my grandfather knew Arabic, and basically the whole culture was Arab. And the other side being Holocaust survivors from Austria – I mean, when I tell people about the Holocaust, they’re really surprised to hear that I have such a large Holocaust story in my family just by looking at me and my skin tone.

The dominant themes in Rafael’s storytelling are integration and ambiguity. He begins by telling a story to introduce himself as Jewish (perhaps realizing from past experience that I would not be able to gauge his ethnicity) and then moves on to his school, which has shared living as its ethos. As he discusses life at Yad b’Yad, frequently changing from first to third person and back again and thereby offering multiple perspectives to the listener, he presents an alternative to the artificial erasure and subsequent reinforcement of boundaries that frequently occurs in coexistence-orientated planned encounter programs. One vivid example of this is the way in which he plaits together Holocaust and Nakba history, first establishing himself as a brown-skinned narrator who has inherited a family legacy of stories from another continent and then revealing himself to feel a personal connection to both events. Another example is how he opens and closes his story: while acknowledging that his identification as Jewish Arab/Arab Jew may be viewed with suspicion or disbelief in Israeli and Palestinian society, the narrative structure makes it clear that for him these identities function not as a source of contradiction or personal tension but as the two poles of his world.

However, while Rafael has been able to integrate Jewishness and Arabness through telling and hearing stories, in narrating himself he is concerned not only with his self-understanding but also with how others perceive him and their response to his presence. While the ambiguity presented by his physical appearance and his bilingualism is thought-provoking and humorous in the relatively safe setting of a classroom or a planned encounter group, it becomes an inadequate disguise in the streets of Beit Safafa [a Palestinian neighbourhood of Jerusalem]:

“I go to Beit Safafa a lot. I have friends from school there. I probably wouldn’t speak Hebrew loudly in the street in Beit Safafa, and I don’t always feel so safe at night…I think when people look at me they know who I am. Internationals, maybe Israelis, they don’t know, but people in Beit Safafa – I think they can tell there’s something about my clothing or my face, they know I’m not Arab, they know I’m Jewish.

When Rafael is relating a fear-inducing situation, such as walking alone at night in a neighbourhood where he is marked out from its inhabitants by his Israeli passport and ethno-religious background, he presents Palestinian passers-by as astute observers, able to detect his
Jewishness through his clothes or his facial features, even in darkness. This fear is echoed in a story related by Amal, a 19-year-old young woman who lives in the Dheisheh refugee camp. She also situates herself on a boundary throughout her storytelling, conscious of being the only female in a household of men (her parents are divorced and she lives with her father and brothers), one of relatively few Dheisheh women who do not wear a headscarf, and most unusually, a holder of Jerusalem residency (her father was born in Shuafat refugee camp, which was formally annexed to the state of Israel in 1967). She describes a visit to Jerusalem and her subsequent sense of alienation in language reminiscent of Levinas:

[O]ne time I was in the car in Jerusalem with my brothers, and there was this bus. Most of them were Israelis, I can tell, of course. And I was just looking, and I don’t know, you can recognize an Arab if you see him. So a guy was in the bus and he saw me and I think he realized I am an Arab, and he flicked me out. He gave me the finger, and I was like what. Like, that’s nice. Yeah, I’d love to walk around in the streets in Jerusalem getting fingers and so on.

For both Rafael and Amal, their identity is written in their faces for hostile passers-by to read; traversing borders and entering spaces that are typically represented as ‘off-limits’ to their community heighten their awareness of who they are, how they might be read, and the possibility of hostility and violence. Border-crossing becomes a painful and often humiliating process. For Amal, who was undocumented for three years as the occupation authorities refused to register her in the same Jerusalem identity category as her father and siblings, and she was unwilling to apply for a green West Bank identity card that would formally separate her from Jerusalem relatives, it is an experience of colonial violence. This finds an echo in Rafael’s experiences of the way in which the possibility of existing as an Arab Jew is routinely denied in the Israeli public sphere:

The process of making discrete, hermetic spaces in which people are held serves the long-running colonial project of enclosing the colonized within boundaries. Clearly the boundaries of race have been drawn by colonizing forces along similar, if not the same, lines: lines that divide the excluded from the privileged, the bordered from the mobile. These lines are slashes between groups, sharp, cutting edges that surely wound when crossed. (Thompson 2001:25)

All the storytellers who situate themselves on a border – most notably Rania and Budour, the Palestinian girls of Israeli citizenship; Yara, the Dutch-Palestinian girl from Bethlehem, and now Amal – describe being wounded by the act of crossing borders. Perhaps due to his status as a member of the dominant group, Rafael focuses more on his Palestinian peers’ experiences of pain than his own: he repeats several times “It’s hard for them” and expresses
particular empathy for Rania. “They’re the only Arab family in this neighbourhood. That’s tough.” Empathy is the predominant theme running through Rafael’s storytelling; for the four Palestinian girls, it is humiliation. Budour and Amal related stories of the degradation that can occur on the border, when their ambiguous status arouses curiosity among the majority group – Jewish students in Budour’s case, middle-class peers from Bethlehem in Amal’s:

Amal: When I went to university, people would be surprised to know that I’m a person from Dheisheh camp. They’d say, “You don’t look like a refugee, or a one from the camps.” And I would be very frustrated, actually. I would be like, “Why would you say that, how should people from the camps look like or sound like?” They have this disturbing stereotype that all people from the camps are very dirty and stupid and backward. I don’t know why or how. Most of the people I know from the camps are very educated and very open-minded and very smart and very achieving…So I was a bit outcast in the university, as I was the one from the camp, and I still am a bit.

Budour: I remember them [Jewish classmates] even telling me [assumes surprised tone], “Oh my God, you don’t look like an Arab, your skin is bright and your hair is bright and it’s not covered,” so they – they only had stereotypes…We were very shocked at first to hear their opinions. When I was in the seventh grade it was when Gilad Shalit was kidnapped, so it was a topic that we used to talk about. When I heard their opinions I was shocked. I didn’t think someone would say something like kill the Arabs and the Arabs are dirt and they’re terrorists. It was a big shock for me, because I only thought that it’s like seeing a – a – a car accident on the news, and you say, “That can’t happen to me. It happens a lot, but it won’t happen to me.” And then when you see it you’re like – I remember that I didn’t know how to – I didn’t digest it yet, I was really shocked, and it took me a week to understand where I really was. I didn’t know how I’m going to handle it, I didn’t know how I’m going to fit in. I didn’t have friends these years… [I]t was also very hard to talk to them, because they wouldn’t really let us to do it. And they were very violent in a physical and in a literature way. It was very hard in the first years. But then when we started to grow up and to understand that OK, if we want to talk we have to really listen, we just became friends. That’s the only way I can explain it.

Budour’s representation of time is intriguing: at fifteen she has only been attending high school for three years, so by stating “I didn’t have friends these years” she could be admitting current loneliness and using the image of time elapsing as a narrative device to distance herself from it or suggesting that her initial experiences at the school were so painful that they seemed to last longer than they did. This disorientation is captured in her stammering, and the sentence, “I didn’t know where I really was.” Another notable feature here is that Budour had the choice of attending an Arab school in Ramle, while Amal’s family put pressure on her not to study at university. Both girls made the decision to cross sharp borders out of conviction that it was right. Budour closed her account of school life as a girl from Wahat as-
Salaam/Neve Shalom with, “I think we are brave.” Meanwhile Rafael continues to visit Palestinian friends in Beit Safafa, even after dark, out of a sense of friendship and his belief in the eventual possibility of (cross)community living.

The border-crossing that becomes apparent from their stories is a vivid example of young people’s political agency and the role they play in community-building: Amal, for example, described how her determination to study at university had transformed her older brothers’ attitudes to education and encouraged them to think about studying for a degree too, although they had initially opposed her plans. She even links her attempts to challenge her family’s views on her future with refugees’ efforts to access education and achieve full civil rights, making the political visible through the personal, and vice versa:

My four brothers and my father, they worked together to pay for the tuition. Compared to universities abroad, it’s not expensive, but here it’s very expensive and not everyone can afford it. And like, my last tuition, I still can’t pay it, the due date was last week. So my father said, “I don’t have any money to pay for you,” so I’m already behind. But still, the refugees still struggle, and try to – you know, they care a lot about education, even though not all of them get the chance to go to university, they care a lot. They fight their way in society. They try to prove themselves, just like I was trying to prove myself to my brothers, it’s the same thing. The camp is trying to prove itself to the people in the cities and to everyone, and of course to the occupation, that I deserve to live and I deserve to – you know, just to be. To exist.

In traversing boundaries, these young people are making alternative stories visible, a political action that invites narrative-based encounter programs to re-evaluate their use of story with teenagers. Rather than being employed as a therapeutic or teaching tool, with the idea that teenagers need “to learn how to talk” (to use Rania’s description of Seeds of Peace’s narrative program), storytelling could be used to give adults insight into the political lives of youth and to strengthen the peace and justice activism that the young people are already involved in, broadly defined. This means recognizing their freedom as storytellers and accepting that young people possess the right to narrate, even if the stories that are told are not necessarily peace-orientated.

It also means acknowledging the violence in storytelling, which Budour captures with her unusual phrasing “violent in a literature way” – she references a corpus of creative writing rather than deploying the more common ‘figurative’. That violence is contained in the other students’ refusal to allow her to speak and tell her own story (“They wouldn’t really let us talk…”) and in the painful realization that in order to talk she “would have to really listen,” even at the cost of hearing her ethnic community being labelled as terrorist and described as dirt. Her story about this process provokes questions about the structural quality
of such violence and Budour’s conception of the community beyond her village: she had previously perceived the dehumanizing language that became her everyday norm as “like a car accident on the news,” an unpredictable occurrence viewed from the double remove of the television screen and a Jewish-Arab cooperative village. Another source of shock and pain was her teacher’s reaction:

All the times when we were called names, the teacher was in the class. And she wouldn’t say, “Don’t call them like this, they’re your friends.” She would say [adopts irritated tone], “Keep it down. You’re yelling.” And that’s what’s wrong here, not the fact that they’re saying ‘kill the Arabs’ and ‘we hate the Arabs’ when there are Arab kids in the class. I can understand if they’re not there, but we’re there and you’re our teacher.

Budour switches from the more distant third-person singular, which denotes absence (“I can understand if they’re not there…”) to first-person plural (“We’re there”) in order to emphasize her presence. It is as though she is no longer addressing me, but confronting the teacher; time is liquid in her storytelling, and she moves frequently across the border between past and present. However, while violence cannot be contained in time, she does expect it to be contained spatially. Her comment suggests that she expects racist conversation to happen when she is outside the room, and even accepts this; but that she demands something different when she is in the group.

Violence’s systemic nature is revealed through the act of border-crossing, her choice to go from Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom to a Jewish school whose pupils have had limited contact with Palestinians, which forced her to address her understanding of community and cope with bullying in order to forge new friendships with peers. Having examined both the violence that is done to the narrator on the border, and the creative power of violating that border, I will examine how young people construct their own boundaries between self and other, the language they use to describe the other, and ways in which the curiosity and narrative anticipation that characterize storytelling may create empathy even in fundamentally violent and exclusionary stories.

“What do they tell about us?”

When asked if there was one particular question she wished she could put to Israelis, Yara replied, “What do their – if she was my age, what do their parents tell about us and what did they used to tell them about the Palestinians. Maybe that’s the only question I’d like to know. How they see us, how they talk about us, how they imagine us and what we think.” With
these words Yara captures a theme that runs through several of the young people’s stories. 15-year-old Natan, a teenager from a West Bank settlement, was more interested in asking me about his Palestinian peers – “What are they saying about us?” – than in telling his own stories, evidently seeing my visits as fleeting windows into Palestinian community life. When I asked 12-year-old Junayd to create an image or write a story that he would like to appear on the other side of the separation barrier, within sight of Israelis, he drew soldiers guarding a locked settlement, commenting, “I want to show them how they look.” In transforming the separation wall into a mirror, Junayd suggests that he sees Israelis as being unaware of their own appearance. Yara’s desire to find a similar ‘mirror’ in an Israeli teenage girl implies that she is uncertain about how she is seen. At other points in her storytelling, after mention of the army, this uncertainty solidifies into a conviction that Palestinian teenagers are feared:

    The people my age, like especially the boys – these boys always throw stones, so I think when they [soldiers], err – not me, but maybe the boys – they – I don’t know, but these are basically their enemies, these teenagers…this is the age that the soldiers hate, because they’re always protesting, they go on demonstrations, they – this is the age that the soldiers hate. But I don’t really know what they think about me.

This depiction of the soldiers and their dislike for Palestinian youth calls to mind Natan’s frustrated questioning: “Why do they do that, throw rocks? Don’t they see it doesn’t work?” These questions were posed on the cusp of his own enlistment, showing that his dominant feelings on entering the army are exasperation towards Palestinian youth and curiosity about them. His curiosity is bound up with his enlistment, just as Yara’s interest in how she is perceived by Israelis and her own perception of them is narrated in relation to the military. Young people’s curiosity about the Other may coalesce around conscription due to an awareness that the soldier and the stone-thrower are usually age-related peers, as well as the fact that military installations are the main locus of contact between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank.

    This returns us to the precise question of how these installations govern what is seen, and by whom. In his article on museology and representations of the Other, focusing on Orientalism and Victorian-era exhibitions, Timothy Mitchell asks, “Is there, perhaps, some more integral relationship between representation, as a modern technique of meaning and order, and the construction of otherness so important to the colonial project?” (Mitchell 1992:290) This question encourages us to see checkpoints, like museums and other state institutions, as part of an “apparatus of representation.” In the checkpoint, soldiers are set apart by their uniforms and weaponry; they often man individual booths, while Palestinians
are crowded into chutes, categorized by the colour of their ID card and the type of permit they hold. 17-year-old Yuval, a boy from a rural West Bank settlement, describes witnessing the lines forming as he drives by checkpoints in the pre-dawn; with the exception of a story about one local farmer, he only ever speaks of Palestinians as a group. Checkpoint architecture encourages this perception. In her checkpoint stories, Yara recounts how she has observed soldiers closely to find out which ones are easiest to pass (“I never go to the girls. They’re the strictest”) and how she deliberately dresses unobtrusively, making sure she has no metal buttons that might call soldiers’ attention to her. Paradoxically, given that the checkpoint is designed for surveillance, her observation of the female soldiers and her strategizing over dress is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon’s veiled Algerian woman, “who sees without being seen” and “frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity.” (Fanon 2004:48)

Aware that she is perceived as an element of an amorphous mass rather than as an individual, Yara uses this knowledge to camouflage herself, and to frustrate the checkpoint’s purpose by passing without permission. Meanwhile, when asked what question she would put to Israelis given the chance, she pictures herself face-to-face with just one person – another 16-year-old girl – and expresses curiosity about how she and her community are depicted in that girl’s home, and what the unknown girl imagines Yara’s inner life to be like. This imaginary exchange invites a reciprocity that does not exist in the checkpoint lines, showing that while checkpoint architecture is significant in shaping young people’s perceptions of one another, they are sometimes able to breach its categories in their storytelling.

This breach did not occur in Yuval’s answer to why the army holds such an important place in his life, which dealt with his self-concept and the perceptions others have of him:

First of all the answer isn’t in the brain, it’s in the heart. And I feel it really hard. I think this is the biggest problem in the conflict, everyone here feels things, and other people can’t understand their feelings. I feel part of the Jewish people. My grandparents, in the Holocaust – you see, you feel part of the Jewish people. And I see myself as part of all Israel, and as part of all the human beings in the world, but also as part of the religious people in here. And that’s one answer to this question. It’s my people. I want to do my best for them. You learn that some people are asking, “What can someone else do for me?” Rights, human rights, what I deserve, what I can have, and sometimes the question you need to ask is what my commitments are, what I can give, how I can improve the world, be a better person, how can we be better people…

I guess I won’t be seen [by Palestinians] in such a good way, because, I think – unfortunately they can’t see the Israeli soldiers, people who came to – people who came to try and make life bad. I guess when I’m a soldier I’ll try to be the nicest person I can be. All Israel’s army is trying to do this. Sometimes you have to do arrests and you have to do things that you have to do, but – I think I’ll try to be the nicest man that I can, but I think they won’t see me as the nicest man in the world.
Conscription is presented as the anchor of Yuval’s life, with him casting his religious beliefs, national identity, moral sensibility, and awareness of his family’s history of persecution round the army. He pits conscript service against the human rights discourse that is prevalent in Palestine, treating conscription as a civic selfless act while human rights discourse is preoccupied with the self. Throughout his interview, he would express unease over Palestinians’ quality of life, pointing to a village that lies within sight of his settlement and remarking “We are not clear [innocent].” However, when he is placed face-to-face with imaginary Palestinian watchers, that sense of responsibility dissipates; and rather than continuing to expand outwards (“I see myself as part of all Israel, and as part of all the human beings in the world…”) Yuval’s self-concept shrinks. He will now be “the nicest man he can be,” with the phrasing implying that he will be constrained. Those constraints are treated as inevitabilities rather than as ethical choices: “You have to do things that you have to do.” That sentence could be interpreted as resigned, defensive, or even pleading, as though Yuval is directly addressing the Palestinians whose accusatory gaze he is now imagining, while his second person implicates the listener – conscription is a communal obligation.

The idea of army service as inevitable also surfaces at Yad b’Yad, with one teacher telling me, away from the students, “The Arab kids understand it’s something the Jews have to do.” The young people themselves presented conscription as divisive, with Rafael recounting:

It’s actually very hard for a lot of – mostly the Arab students here, having a friend for so long and then having him go to the army...In our class, most of the Arabs said that if someone would go to the army they would never speak to him again...[T]hey perceive the army as something very violent, they see it every day when they go to school, having to go through checkpoints, and having them check you every day, and you know, maybe one time going to a place and you see your friend whom you studied with for twelve years standing in the checkpoint seeing if you have guns and checking you.

In Rafael’s storytelling the amorphous anonymity of the checkpoint is replaced by a jolting face-to-face encounter between two former friends. When asked about his own decision to refuse conscription (“I would go to prison before I went to the army”) Rafael returned to the face-to-face relation, describing how his moral opposition had been nurtured through the stories he had heard from classmates and former soldiers:

I was considering going to the army...because [pause] the consensus in Israel is, you know, you go to school, you go to the army. It’s just a phase, a step in life. And
especially after Kids4Peace and after Yad b’Yad and the stories I’ve heard of their experience with soldiers, you know, going to school and seeing soldiers, and all the stories I’ve actually heard from soldiers, and in my synagogue, it’s actually really close by, it’s a Reform Jewish synagogue, and this Rosh ha’Shana [Jewish New Year] a soldier came and told us about how his unit came to – to – to houses and, you know, just got, they were bored, and they just broke inside houses and broke a lot of things and stole some things and just got the family into one room, and they said the family was in complete mental distress because of that. And they did it just for fun. And that really affected me…I think I wouldn’t go to the army, it got my opinion a lot stronger.

The destabilizing power of storytelling unsettled Rafael’s perception of the army as a natural stage in life, prompting him to re-evaluate his own choices after graduation and what those choices might mean for the integrated bilingual community of which he is a part. In indicating our proximity to the synagogue where he had heard the soldier’s testimony, he showed that knowledge of military occupation and its injustices is built into his everyday landscape. In representing checkpoints, he encourages the listener to assume the eyes of a Palestinian (“You see your friend whom you studied with standing in the checkpoint…”), demonstrating once again his ability to transgress and challenge the borders that conscription reinforces.

Rania and Budour also comment on conscription’s divisiveness and the threat it poses to community as imagined by youth who have grown up in a bilingual milieu, with Budour adopting an inclusive second-person voice as she imagines conscription’s effect on Jewish friends from Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom:

I think they really think about it in a very deep way before they go. They feel guilty from both sides, because if they don’t go, the Israeli community would look at them in a way, and if they do go, then the Palestinians will look at them in a way. Both are negative. So it’s really hard for them. I think they feel that they’re stuck in between and they have to choose…Adam [a Jewish teenager] said about the law, “It’s a law and it’s important.” I said, “There are ways to get out of this law.” It’s not something that you can’t – and I said, “I think you are considering going to the army not because of the law, but because you want to go to the army, because you feel that you need to go the army.”…And he said that when people will look at his resume and see that he didn’t look at the army, it will affect him and his future, and this is right. This is the way this country goes…Even if you disagree with what the army does, you have the law, you have your future, and you have what people will say about you, so it’s also dangerous for you not to go to the army, and you’re also still scared…I don’t really know what [roles] they [conscripts from the village] serve in, because they talk about it in numbers, like 801, and I don’t really care. When it comes to the army, for me it’s either go or don’t go. If you go, I think it doesn’t matter so much what you do, because in one way or another, you’re serving this country in a way that harms the Palestinian people. So it doesn’t matter if he’s in the plane with weapons to Lebanon or if he’s cooking, it’s still the same purpose eventually.
As with Rafael’s storytelling, Budour’s use of the second person singular (“Even if you disagree…”) encourages the reader to assume the perspective of a member of the ‘other’ community. Budour emphasizes their fear (“…and you’re still afraid”), remaining sensitive to that fear even when she challenges Adam over his decision not to refuse conscription. While she does not differentiate between combatant and non-combatant service, she does distinguish between the army as an institution and the individuals who constitute its ranks. Her storytelling calls to mind that of 11-year-old Abdullah, a Palestinian boy from Hebron, who was preoccupied by stabbing attacks perpetrated by Palestinians against Israelis. When I asked if he could stab a soldier, Abdallah replied, “No. I can’t get close enough to one and they wear special jackets anyway.” Rather than focusing on the moral or political dimensions of the question, he concentrated on practicalities; he sees the properties of the flak jacket, not the face.

Several Israeli teenagers, particularly 16-year-old Nurit and 15-year-old Stav, imagined attitudes like Abdullah’s to be typical of how Palestinian youth must see them, attributing such attitudes to a hostile Palestinian education system:

_Stav:_ [Y]ou see on TV shows the books kids that age study, and it’s very anti-Israeli and like, yeah. Anti-Jewish…[T]hey [Stav’s teachers] show a lot at school, like we see, we learn _ezrachut_ [citizenship] and it’s about Israel and we learn different stuff, who’s against us and what wars and stuff like that, so they showed us.

_Nurit:_ I once saw a video that was shared on Facebook, and it said it’s terrible how the Arabs teach their children to behave, and then you saw it’s a children’s show, a TV show, and the person there says, “What do you do to Jews?” and then the kids, they answer, “You kill them” or “You hit them” or you – so I have this idea in my head and it’s because I saw this video that probably that’s how they teach their children.

Nurit and Stav have formed this image of Palestinian youth’s environment based largely on their own schooling; learning “who’s against us” is integral to Stav’s conception of citizenship. As she describes Palestinian peers’ attitudes to her, she starts to question unprompted the education she herself is receiving:

Five-year-old kids are taught to hate Jews and that Jews are bad and Jews are – just like five-year-old kids here are, “Look, be aware that Arabs are – that Arabs will kill people –.” You see it, they show like…a certain edge, the worst, just like they [Palestinians] probably see the worst in – like I’m sure not all people tell their kids that they have to – [trails off] I’m talking about an extreme, like not all TV shows probably tell kids to kill Jews, just like not all parents tell their kids not to talk to Arabs and to – so I think they’re taking different extreme ends and so that’s what we think, and I think it’s because we don’t learn together and we don’t know them and – like I really don’t know anyone who’s Arab. Like, the cleaners in my school, they’re very nice and that’s all the Arabs I know and that know me.
The only Palestinians who feature in the sisters’ autobiographical stories occupy a subaltern role, as cleaners; they stand in stark contrast to the young would-be killers imagined by Nurit. Both sisters are aware that in narrating the Other they are narrating the unknown, which later prompts Stav to oppose segregated education (“It’s wrong to separate kids so much”) and Nurit to wonder how a Palestinian girl might imagine her:

When you imagine a school in – where they live, then for me, the first thing that comes up is a very dark place, like not very serious about studies, more about hurting Jews…and then that’s probably what she sees when she thinks of a Jewish school. I understand now. For sure it’s what we’re taught and not what’s really going on – well, some of it.

Similar uncertainty is woven through the stories of the violence that the sisters have experienced. Nurit identified summer 2014 [Operation Protective Edge] as “the first time I’ve ever been involved in a war”, with Stav clarifying, “[Before] it didn’t really come to Ra’anana.” Nurit described watching television and being terrified as she realized that rocket warning sirens were wailing in the neighbourhood, not only on screen. The threat was represented only by sound; while for Palestinian youth violence is usually epitomized by a visible army presence. Nurit focused on the sirens rather than the rocket attack they denoted, and neither she nor Stav mentioned the unseen rocketeers in this story:

I asked my father, “What if it gets to Ra’anana?” and he said, “Don’t worry, it won’t.” And then after a few minutes we started hearing sirens, not just from the television, but also from here, and it was – the first, I mean the first siren I’d ever been in, and Stav was babysitting at our neighbour’s house, so I got very scared. What if she didn’t know what to do?

This highlights the principal difference between Palestinian and Israeli narratives of violence, self, and other: for Palestinian youth violence is structural, and therefore expected; whereas for Israeli youth it is a paralyzing possibility that cements their dread of an unknown and unpredictable Other, whose face is usually beyond sight. In Stav and Nurit’s case, their sense of remoteness from the Other is mirrored by an unidentified sense of remoteness from their town’s recent history: Stav, born in the middle of the Second Intifada, asserts that “it’s the first time the merkaz [central region] people have really felt the war”, apparently perceiving the suicide bombings that occurred in the merkaz as spatially and temporally distant from her.

Nurit and Stav frequently use distancing techniques, chiefly by avoiding words such as ‘Palestine’ or other geographic terms that invoke Palestinian presence. Nurit comes close to doing so in her description of the 1949 armistice line, but then retracts: “They call it the
Green Line, which is where it belongs to Israel completely and where there are also – where it’s Territories.” Both of them use ‘Arab’ far more frequently than ‘Palestinian’. Stav, when telling stories about her experiences during military incursions in Gaza, conflates Palestinian paramilitary activity with Islamist terrorism in the wider world. This has the simultaneous effect of making Palestinians seem much further away (while remaining source of fear), and subsuming the idea of Palestinian peoplehood into a pan-Arab, pan-Islamic identity:

[The Muslims and Arabs, their piguim [attacks] are much more extreme. I didn’t hear about extremist Jews flying planes into buildings and killing thousands of people, and like people here bombed buses and shopping malls with a lot of people, and I didn’t hear about Jews going to a big mall and blowing themselves up with the whole mall, and I think like [pause] they’re much more extreme and everything has to be done violently and showing off that you have power or something like that.

While Stav frames Palestinian paramilitary activity as violent braggadocio, Nurit distances it from its political context, presenting it as a purely individual choice motivated by personal beliefs:

I think there’s a big difference between the personal things and the political things that someone could choose to do. I’m talking about piguim now. Someone from them – even if it’s against what he’s taught, and I don’t know what they teach them anymore, but it’s personal, if he goes and does something, it hasn’t got to do with a war. It’s personal. I think there’s a really big difference.

For both sisters, war is a legitimate act driven by a need for self-defence, which means that they do not perceive Palestinian fighters as true soldiers or their activities as war. Describing Operation Protective Edge [2014], Stav challenges Nurit’s use of the term ‘army’ to describe Hamas’s paramilitary wing, stating, “It’s not an army, it’s a terrorist organization. That’s why they didn’t call it a war, they called it an operation, because it wasn’t even against an army, it was people throwing rockets at us and us going and fighting.” The word ‘fighting’ contains moral authority and purpose; pigua suggests gratuitous violence. The sisters do not see Palestinians as requiring self-defence, with Nurit commenting, “If Hamas wouldn’t start wars, I don’t think Israel – unless we were in some kind of danger, we would have stayed in peace.” Her perception of Palestinian fighters is informed by her view of the Israeli army, with one acting as a moral foil for the other. The narrative is a stark one of good and evil.

Among Palestinian participants, especially younger ones, it was common to hear ‘Israelis’, ‘soldiers’, and ‘Jews’ used interchangeably. Yara shared the story of how, when she was four years old, her father had taken her to the beach. When she returned to
Bethlehem, her mother had asked how she had spent the day. She replied, “I played with the children of the army.” She examines the origin of such perceptions among Palestinian youth:

When I was four years old, when you told me ‘Jews’ or ‘Israelis’, I only used to think about the army. I didn’t think about other people. But now after I grew up and after much more experience, I realized that there are other people than the army. But these children still don’t know…Mainly because of the [Second] Intifada and the bombings, all the people were talking about Jews, Israelis, army, and it just stuck in my mind that Jews are only the army.

As is the case in Stav and Nurit’s storytelling, all the Palestinian participants narrate Palestinian paramilitary activity in relation to the actions of Israeli soldiers. This is most apparent in Amal’s memories of the Second Intifada:

I remember that we were in the roads of Bethlehem, and the tanks were everywhere. And I remember that we were driving and one of the military vehicles similar to a tank, they started driving towards us, and we had this really small car, and they were – and they – it walked above the pavement to kind of run us over. And my father was driving so fast and we kind of ran away, but we were – we panicked and were like oh my God, they wanted to kill us. I don’t know why I remember this one very clearly.

I remember another thing, that I saw the Palestinian resistance with my own eyes. I was also with my parents and we saw this, you know, this truck with people on top of it, and they were driving towards Beit Jala because it’s a very high point and you can see Jerusalem. I think they had a gun or something. And we were like oh my God, they’re going to fight the soldiers, and we followed them. And they were like, “What the hell are you doing? Go back!” and we were like, “Oh my God, go ahead, you’re doing a great job!” Now when I say it, it sounds like I’m promoting violence. [Laughs] But it’s not, it’s resistance, it’s different, and people don’t realize what resistance is. You know, we’re being attacked, you’re going to have to fight back. You’re not going to just sit there. I don’t know, I was very excited that day. Not in a violent way or anything. I didn’t see anything being – you know, I didn’t see the shooting, but I saw, I think I saw the gun. And I saw the very scary – well, not scary men, they were very brave.

Amal emphasizes the power of Israeli troops, with the verb she uses to describe the military vehicle’s pursuit (“It walked above the pavement to…run us over”) giving the vehicle a monstrous sentience. The machine is faceless. By contrast, she is uncertain about the paramilitaries’ armaments (“I think they had a gun…I didn’t see the shooting…”) in a way that emphasizes them as individuals over their military capabilities. Her attitude towards the paramilitaries seems conflicted, with relief, pride, and enthusiasm blending with a briefly acknowledged and hastily retracted fear.

Political violence provides the primary vocabulary with which the young people describe members of the ‘other’ community. When asked what they associate with the word
Gaza, the most common answers from Israeli youth were ‘rockets’, ‘Qassams’, and ‘darkness’. As seen in Chapter 3, metaphor provides a richer vocabulary for the narration of alterity, which was obvious in the storytelling of twelve-year-old Maayan, who lives in a Gush Etzion settlement. Although she brought up “the wars in Gaza” of her own accord, remembering frightening midnight telephone calls in which her father had been summoned to reserve duty, she was reluctant to go into detail. She did not use ‘Arab’ or ‘Palestinian’ once, simply referring to “whoever’s fighting us.” On being invited to choose three pictorial dice and tell a story based on the images, she picked her cubes out carefully (an apple, a lock, and an alien face) and recounted:

Is this a mask or an alien? I will make it be an alien. So this alien wants to get to the apple, but he has to pass all kinds of stuff to get to it. A lot of problems. [Long pause] All kinds of people don’t want to help him. They don’t want to be the ones in last place. He’s an alien. I think the apple’s not really an apple, it’s something like – something like a lot of gold, or treasure or something. Something that this alien really needs. In the end he gets to it, and he shows other people that it’s important to help each other.

This story was narrated immediately after Maayan’s reluctant mention of the besieged Gaza Strip. The story can be read as a guarded commentary on attitudes towards Gaza among the Israeli public: “All kinds of people don’t want to help him. They don’t want to be the ones in last place.” It ends with the alien finding what he “really needs”, and teaching those who were reluctant to help the importance of supporting one another in spite of their fears of ending “in last place.” The “last place” hierarchy is reminiscent of the ethnic stratification that exists in Israel/Palestine, and Maayan’s story communicates both the fear of becoming the one oppressed and the ethical impossibility of perpetuating oppression. Metaphor enables her to express empathy for people beyond her sight and knowledge.

Noga was more direct when asked for her associations with the word:

Gaza. I think – I see a picture in my head. A lot of destruction. And I have a picture of Shuja’iyya, you know, after we – I think there are really sad stories. I don’t know how – I don’t think we have a solution. I feel that when I think Gaza, I more think of them than rockets, than when they shoot at us.

Shuja’iyya is a neighbourhood in Gaza City that was the scene of a protracted Israeli assault in Operation Protective Edge, resulting in a high civilian death toll and the obliteration of much housing and infrastructure. Noga is unusual in that she knows the name of the area. When I asked how she had found out about Shuja’iyya, she replied, “I go on their Internet.” Just as her initial antagonism to the word Nakba was eroded by her awareness that it is “a sad
story for them”, she is conscious that in “Shuja’iyya, you know, after we – there are really sad stories.” That “after we” suggests a personal grief that leads her to concentrate on the Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza rather than on the rocket fire that dominates other young Israelis’ storytelling. Notably she shies away from describing what “we” did in Shuja’iyya, giving no details of the stories she read. Palestinian residents appear late in her stories: when describing her brothers’ combat service in Gaza, she commented, “They went in after the fighting, when it was empty.” It appears that Noga is unable to entertain the possibility that her brothers participated in violence, causing her to clear the space of its inhabitants before they enter the narrative. However, her sudden restoration of Gaza’s population to Gaza suggests that it is not always possible to retain this sterile image. Taboo memory has surfaced in her story through “their Internet”, and awareness of the other has compromised her image of the army and potentially her image of her own family, underlining the impurity and the danger of storytelling.

This chapter has examined the polluting dangers in depth, recognizing that storytelling in conflict zones has been sanitized by an excessive focus on its role in psychotherapy and peace education. Critically moving beyond these institutional applications of storytelling has enabled us to better understand its place in the lives of youth in Israel/Palestine, acknowledging that while it can be used repressively in adult-led peace-oriented groups, it has also been reclaimed by young people as a political act. The analysis reveals stories to be liminal spaces, distinguished by ambiguity and ambivalence, and therefore spaces in which multiplicity of apparently conflicting ideas can be expressed simultaneously. Emanuel Levinas’s metaphor of the face, in which the tension between violent urges and the impossibility of violence is presented as fundamental to every human relationship, forms a useful philosophical framework in which to interpret the stories of conflict-affected youth: it warns the listener not to attempt to reconcile perceived contradictions. Friction is intrinsic to storytelling itself, an idea that is reinforced by the content of the young people’s stories, which continue to coalesce around fault lines.

With the exception of Israeli teenagers in Ra’anana, all the study participants may be classed as inhabiting a border of some kind (and participants in Ra’anana spoke of how the sound of rocket warning sirens had the effect of transforming the region’s ‘centre’ into the edge, reinforcing the idea of borders as treacherous and shifting). As a result, these stories are all characterized by a sense of distance and separation, paired with an acute awareness of the other’s proximity. This quality is reminiscent of Augusto Boal: “Theatre is born when the human being discovers that it can observe itself…It perceives where it is and where it is not,
and imagines where it could go.” (Boal 1995:13) Imagining where one could (or could not) go is part of the narration of community and belonging, which is apparent throughout this chapter. Many stories deal with journeys frustrated by political violence or overshadowed by the threat of violence, with borders and crossing-points associated with destabilizing, uncertain, and potentially dangerous encounters with the other.

The significance of these different fault lines to young people’s sense of self and wider community is apparent from the amount of autobiographical storytelling that is structured around them. Their role in how young people imagine the other hints that these liminal spaces may also be instrumental in the transmission of the other’s stories, such as the one Noga told at the very end of our last meeting. Consequently the next chapter takes us back to these liminal spaces – the separation barrier that Junayd transforms into a mirror for Israelis’ use, the checkpoints that provoke questions about family and belonging for Yara, and the ethno-linguistic boundary straddled by teenagers at Yad b’Yad – and considers them as sites of transmission for forbidden histories, rather than places in which such histories are suppressed or driven underground.
Chapter Five – Forbidden Histories in Contested Spaces

Narrative drifts into forbidden terrain

The fraught nature of the Israeli relationship to the Nakba and the Palestinian encounter with the Holocaust is exemplified by the location of Israel’s Holocaust memorial museum, Yad Vashem. Lying within sight of the unmarked remains of Deir Yassin, a depopulated Palestinian village that was the site of a massacre by the Irgun in 1948, the museum’s exit is spanned by a bridge inscribed with Ezekiel 37:14: “I will put my spirit in you and you shall live again, and I will set you upon your own soil.” The threads binding Palestinian awareness of the Holocaust to the memory of displacement and loss that occurred during the Nakba (‘catastrophe’ in Arabic) were first made explicit by Emil Habibi, a Palestinian citizen of Israel, in his essay ‘Your Holocaust, Our Catastrophe.’ “In the eyes of the Arabs the Holocaust is conceived as primordial sin; by its power the Zionist movement managed to convince millions of Jews that its way is the right one.” (Habibi 1986:26) The result has been a deep societal reluctance to address the Holocaust openly, frequently manifesting as denial.

In Israel the Nakba culminated in state-sponsored acts of erasure, such as planting woodland to conceal traces of former Palestinian habitation. Grassroots attempts to foster remembrance in Israel resulted in the passing of the so-called Nakba Law in 2011, which prohibits publicly funded institutions from holding commemorative events. Two years previously a history textbook produced for Arab schools in Israel was withdrawn by the Ministry of Education because it contained the term ‘Nakba’ (Rohde 2012:247), while a second text aimed at Jewish high school students, Nationalism: Building a State in the Middle East, was confiscated from bookshops at the Ministry’s intervention because the authors had used the phrase ‘ethnic cleansing’ in relation to the events of 1948. (Kashti 2009) Returning to Yad Vashem and the ruins of Deir Yassin, the museum’s name (‘A Place and a Name’ in Hebrew) carries bitter significance for Palestinian communities: demolitions and forestation have transformed place so that the Nakba is not immediately visible, while government education policy represses its name.

Repression characterizes recent public responses to the Holocaust in Palestinian society. In 2012 UNRWA teachers’ union protested against the introduction of the Holocaust “under any name or pretext” to the UN-sponsored curriculum taught in refugee camps in Jordan. One teacher commented to a journalist, “I would prefer to resign from my job than teach my students to sympathize with the same people who took our land.” (Nicky 2012) As I began my fieldwork in March 2014, Mohammed Dajani, then a political science professor at
Al-Quds University, led a group of students on an educational visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The trip generated fierce controversy that escalated to violence. Dajani received death threats; his car was torched outside his home. He eventually resigned his post. On an institutional level, the Holocaust and the Nakba are presented as two competing histories colliding in the same geographical space.

Guided by Guy Debord’s concept of derive or drift, “a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances,” this chapter examines how young people use storytelling to navigate this contested space and the taboo memories that are embedded in its landscape:

Dérives involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.

In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. Chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a dérive point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones. (Debord 1958:65)

Although developed in relation to urban space, the theory is equally applicable to storytelling and its role in our navigation of the past. Memory as mediated through history textbooks or museums is analogous to a journey, which has a known destination and point of departure, while storytelling lacks this structure. It is difficult to tell where one story ends and another begins, and tellers and listeners may become “caught up” in tales that flow into one another. (Frank 2010) Exemplified in folk tales, these “narrative drifts” are inherent to oral culture. (Griffin 2006) Recognizing that stories are potential dérives, with the power to reveal “the constant currents, fixed points and vortexes” that carry us into or away from forbidden histories, I chose not to take the Holocaust and the Nakba as departure points or destinations. I rarely introduced these histories into the storytelling sessions directly, instead waiting to see if, when, and where they would emerge. The result was a fascinating insight into the place of historic mass violence in the development of young people’s self-concept, as they frequently linked these events with their own births.

This chapter opens with a definition of forbidden history, informed by the young people’s storytelling, before mapping the “constant currents, fixed points and vortexes” through which these seemingly polarized histories cross-fertilize and communicate with each other. As several storytellers connected the Holocaust and the Nakba with birth, the function of forbidden histories as near-primal origin stories is given particular attention. The chapter
argues that existing taboos are reinforced by the Nakba and the Holocaust’s status as origin stories. Drawing on Michael Rothberg’s theory of multidirectional memory, which challenges the popular understanding of such histories as collective memories in competition, it identifies the counter-currents that flow through young people’s storytelling and pass beneath mainstream national narratives on forbidden history, asking what alternative ideas of community these might nurture.

**Topographies of forbidden history in Israel/Palestine**

Authorized history, epitomized by government-sanctioned school textbooks, may be read as a “national biography” that encourages citizens “to identify themselves as part of a collective body, the nation, to which they belong…and to which they owe allegiance.” (Cajani 2007:1) This approach to history developed concurrently with the modern nation-state, which provided new ways of classifying groups of people. Recognizing that classification systems are closely bound up with ideas of taboo and pollution, as “taboo protects the local consensus on how the world is organised” (Douglas 1966), Liisa Malkki suggests that refugees and displaced persons form “a dangerous category because they blur national (read: natural) boundaries…They represent an attack on the categorical order of nations.” (Malkki 1993:7) Taboo histories also challenge that categorical order: their narrators or protagonists tend to be located in the blurred margins of society, as with the refugees of Malkki’s study; the narrative of belonging and allegiance that forms the backbone of national identity is fractured by these “voices from below.” (Worby and Ally 2013:462) The challenge they pose to mainstream or nationalized history is the first recurrent characteristic of forbidden histories, followed closely by the social position of their narrators.

This intimate relationship between forbidden history and political disenfranchisement is made apparent in James Scott’s work on power relations, which focuses on the “hidden transcripts” of resistance that lie beneath outward performances of subservience from marginalized groups:

> What may develop in such circumstances is virtually a dual culture: the official culture filled with bright euphemisms, silences, and platitudes and an unofficial culture that has its own history…its own knowledge of shortages, corruption, and inequalities that may be widely known but that may not be introduced into the public discourse. (Scott 1992:51)

According to this analysis, knowledge of the unofficial culture and its attendant histories is disseminated through a hidden language that is predominantly oral. Its oral nature can be
inferred through the components identified by Scott, most of which are more closely associated with spoken language than with writing – “rumour, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures…” (Scott 1992:137) These covert and fluid oral modes of transmission allow forbidden histories to flourish even in climates of severe political repression, and locate them within the disciplinary boundaries of oral history. Through its attention to personal narrative, oral history “provides access to undocumented experience…more significantly, the ‘hidden histories’ of people on the margins: workers, women, indigenous peoples, and other oppressed or marginalised groups” (Thomson 1999:291); and through “the power of open telling…it democratizes tellers and listeners by easing the monologic power of what is said into the collaborative, cogenerative, and yet potentially discordant act of saying and hearing it.” (Pollock 2005:4) This potential for easing that monologic power and thereby subverting mainstream or nationalised ‘written’ history is grounded in oral history’s “performative nature as well as the destabilising influence of the interviewer’s presence.” (Robins 1998:46) Making it clear that forbidden history’s oral nature and the social position of its narrators are related, not merely incidental, Scott also frames his analysis of public and hidden transcripts in terms of performance, recognising that forbidden histories are illicitly injected into the public transcript through acting, elaborate role-play, and other oral “arts of resistance” that by their nature necessitate an audience. (Scott 1992:162)

Need for an audience has also been examined by trauma theory. Describing Freud’s parable of the burning child, in which a dead boy appears to his sleeping father in a dream to plead for help as his corpse catches fire in the next room, Cathy Caruth notes that trauma is epitomized by “this plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken (to awaken, indeed, to a burning).” (Caruth 1996:9) Consequently another distinctive feature of forbidden history is trauma and the accompanying need for a witness. However, the role of the witness is fraught with complications and may not be assumed openly. In her vivid applied linguistic study of the intergenerational transmission of Holocaust memory, Ruth Wajnryb identifies silencing as a recurrent phenomenon in conversations between survivor parents and children born after the war. Her interviewees, adult children of mainly Polish Jewish immigrants to Australia, report that questions about their parents’ wartime experiences were stoppered with “Let’s not talk about that” or similar sentences that indicated the child had “strayed into forbidden terrain” (Wajnryb 2010:6), even though parents would paradoxically voice disappointment if they believed their children were not interested enough – an ambivalent desire to be heard without
having to tell. The children’s knowledge of the prohibited terrain was usually amassed obliquely, as the traumatic nature of the history to be communicated threatens to overwhelm both teller and listener. “To compensate, the communication becomes increasingly indirect: messages are fragmented and dissonant, and meaning is so oblique that listeners’ inferential skills are obliged to work overtime.” (Wajnryb 2010:238) The study details what Wajnryb terms “the pragmatics of silence”, demonstrating how the traumatic nature of forbidden histories is woven into their linguistic expression.

It becomes clear from her interviews with survivors of other atrocities that these linguistic conventions are not particular to the transmission of Holocaust memory in survivor homes. They distinguish the narration of forbidden histories in other contexts, in which “knowing and not knowing are entangled in the language of trauma and in the stories associated with it.” (Caruth 1996:5) Trauma is inextricably bound up with the idea of repression and unspoken knowledge, which finds a parallel in the political repression of forbidden history. These four hallmarks of forbidden history – its traumatic nature, its orality, the marginalized position of its narrators, and its deviation from mainstream national or community narratives – have been thoroughly if incidentally documented across the literature on oral history and collective memory studies, with orality emerging as a way for oppressed groups to subvert hegemonic national narratives and to make taboo memories heard. (Rickard 1998)

Another characteristic of forbidden history – the marginalization of its narrators – is of special interest given the power dynamics that exist in Israel/Palestine. The Holocaust is integral to the dominant national narrative, which presents the state’s creation as a people’s rebirth after unspeakable tragedy, with Palestinians frequently cast as Nazi collaborators. In an address to the UN made in October 2015, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu suggested that Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husayni, a prominent figure in Mandatory Palestine, persuaded Hitler to commit genocide. But although the narrators of Holocaust history are not marginalized in the Israeli-Palestinian context, its protagonists – the victims and survivors who held a precarious position as an ethno-religious minority in Europe – are marginalized. Along with public attempts to implicate Palestinians in the Holocaust, the suffering and powerlessness of the protagonists reinforce the public taboo that it carries in Palestinian society. 19-year-old Amal, a refugee in Dheisheh camp, adopted a belligerently indifferent stance towards Jewish collective memory that demonstrates the taboo:
I hear these Holocaust stories, like a woman who came here after her family were all dead or missing, and I know it sounds bad but I think, “So what?” My family are still refugees and the Israelis can choose to come and go where they like. It’s sad that her family died but she has a choice about how to live her life. My family didn’t do anything to hurt anyone, but now they’re the ones with no rights.

Amal was reluctant to discuss the Holocaust. Although she was fluent and spontaneous on other topics, telling stories at length without prompts from me, she related this anecdote abruptly at the end of our meeting, when we were having coffee and the recorder had been switched off. She was conscious about the structure of her narration, occasionally reflecting on why she had chosen to tell stories in a particular order, so her decision to tell this story after our session had formally ended – thereby excluding it from her ‘official’ transcript – emphasizes her rejection of the Holocaust as an event relevant to her own life. In light of the way her family’s experiences are denied or marginalized in the Israeli public sphere, her decision to place this anecdote outside her storytelling may be read as her own declaration of narrative power. She explains that she heard about this Holocaust survivor, named only as “a woman” in her story, when answering questions from international visitors at Dheisheh’s youth centre. In retelling the story, she does not reference murder, but describes the survivor’s family as having “died” or being “dead and missing.” Although she acknowledges Holocaust deaths, the verb to die is more nebulous than ‘to be killed’; the nature of the nameless survivor’s loss is diluted through Amal’s lexical choices. She foregrounds her own family’s circumstances through the structure of her story, closing this anecdote with a reference to her named relatives rather than to the nameless Jewish woman and ensuring that they emerge as the story’s central protagonists.

15-year-old Rafael, a Yad b’Yad pupil who has numerous Holocaust survivors in his family, explores possible reasons for such reactions to the Nazi genocide among Palestinians:

[You couldn’t start talking with Palestinians about the Holocaust if you don’t first start talking about the Nakba with Israelis, because I would say in the Palestinian consensus, there’s a lot of, you know, “We don’t get our [remembrance] days, our remembrance doesn’t really get remembered, we don’t feel respected.” So as soon as they feel respected, you know – integrating, teaching people about the Nakba, Israelis – so they would say, “We got the respect we deserve.” So maybe they would be open to hear other stories.

Amal’s stories contain frequent mentions of movement restrictions and her frustration at these percolate her short retelling of the Holocaust survivor’s immigration to Israel (“The Israelis choose to come and go where they like”), while a 16-year-old boy from Hebron describes himself as “living like a chicken in a cage.” Cage imagery is prevalent in many
other stories, particularly those from refugee camps and Hebron’s Old City, which gives resonance to Rafael’s phrase “open to hear other stories.” He sees Nakba commemoration as opening up space for discovery, a doorway through which Palestinians might approach the Holocaust and the place it holds in Israeli Jewish collective memory. In adopting the first-person voice of a Palestinian (“Our remembrance doesn’t really get remembered”) he also draws attention not just to the Nakba itself, but to the importance of the process of remembering for Palestinians – he is concerned not primarily with historical events but with pain currently experienced by peers like Amal. By moving between narrative voices (a common feature of his storytelling, as discussed in the previous chapter) Rafael demonstrates the ethic of inclusive community that he feels open discussion of the Nakba might promote, which makes room for multiple protagonists with their differing histories.

His approach tessellates with Michael Rothberg’s theory of multidirectional memory, which aims to demonstrate “how coming to terms with the Nazi genocide of European Jews has always been intertwined with ongoing processes of decolonization; and to extrapolate the theoretical consequences of that newly understood intertwining for thinking about public memory and group identity.” (Rothberg 2009:309) Responding to the “logic of scarcity” that frequently characterizes popular understanding of collective memory, its place in public life, and its relationship to violence, Rothberg argues that many people assume that the sphere in which collective memories are articulated is a scarce resource and that the interaction of different collective memories in that sphere takes the form of a zero-sum struggle for pre-eminence…While there can be no doubt that many manifestations of contemporary violence, including war and genocide, are in part the product of resentful memories and conflicting views of the past…the conceptual framework through which commentators and ordinary citizens have addressed the relationship between memory, identity, and violence is flawed. Against the framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory – as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources – I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative. (Rothberg 2009:3-4)

Examining both the young people’s stories and mainstream public discourse on Holocaust and Nakba in Israel/Palestine, it becomes apparent that the perception of forbidden histories as encroaching on public space and threatening national identity is reinforced by their status as origin stories. Eli Wiesel has commented, “In the beginning was Auschwitz,” invoking a powerful creation mythos. (Berenbaum 1994:) In her analysis of second-generation Holocaust memory, reflecting on her own childhood perceptions, Eva Hoffman writes, “[T]he Holocaust was the dark root from which the world sprang.” (Hoffman 2005:13) In his 1986
essay discussing Arab reactions to the Holocaust, Emil Habibi describes the Holocaust as “the primordial sin”, suggesting that biblical language and metaphor had also shaped perceptions of the Holocaust in Palestinian popular imagination.

Many young people connected the Holocaust or the Nakba with their birth, with critical points in their development, or with their families. I began a storytelling session with 18-year-old Noga, a young woman from a religious settlement in Gush Etzion, by asking her to list at random the things that have shaped her life:

The Holocaust. That’s very important. [Pause] Then my family… I really don’t know why, I used to read books, I’d watch movies. I don’t know why, actually. My family wasn’t there. It’s very far from me. Not close. I don’t know why, I just – it’s stronger in me, for me more than for the other people I know. My friends, they don’t see the Holocaust as very important. It’s very important, but not as important as it is for me… It started with the stories, the books about kids who were hiding, the camps, and stuff like that. Since I was young I knew I wanted to go there.

The Holocaust emerges as the first formative experience in Noga’s life, and after mentioning her family she returns to the Holocaust in a way that braids the two together, even though none of her relatives were affected. Although she states that “it’s very far from me”, that distance has been negated by “the stories, the books about kids who were hiding.” The stories prompted her to travel to the physical sites of the Holocaust, which she did as soon as she received the opportunity as a secondary school student. She does not name the death camps or give their locations, talking instead about “wanting to go there”, which implies that she understands the Holocaust itself as a place. Her use of the phrase “[the Holocaust] is stronger in me” reveals the extent to which the memory of the genocide has shaped her inner world. A storytelling session with Amal produced an almost identical pattern. Just as Noga links the Holocaust with her family, Amal connects the Nakba with “the beginning of my life”:

1948 is an important date, of course. It’s not going to be something that I can ignore. I didn’t live at that time, but as I said, as a refugee I’ll always go back to that date. So. The Nakba. Then I think I’m going to go to 1995, the day I was born, the year I was born. Yeah, it’s the beginning of my life.

In Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom, 15-year-old Budour told a two-line story that illustrates the Nakba’s formative power in her family: “My father’s story – his name is Kamal, and he’s named after his uncle who disappeared in the Nakba. We don’t know if he died or ran away, so he is called after him.” Whenever Budour hears her father addressed by name, she is reminded of her missing great-uncle; the lost are invoked by the living. The result is that Budour’s life is permeated by the Nakba and an attendant sense of loss: “Even though it
happened many years ago and I haven’t experienced it, I feel like it’s a very big part of me.” Rafael, mentioning his relatives’ deportation to Auschwitz, explained, “I guess when I was maybe four or five, kindergarten, I kind of knew what happened…because it was such a big part of my family.” 17-year-old Yuval, an Orthodox Jewish teenager from a Gush Etzion settlement, told a story about his high school trip to Poland in reply to my story prompt about significant moments in his life. That story also led back to his family and his birthplace, Jerusalem:

Actually, I remember one moment – it’s not a thing, it’s like a moment, a little moment – when I began to – last summer. I went to – teenagers in Israel, in the summer, when they’re sixteen, seventeen or something like this, teenagers go to Poland. The Holocaust. Actually, it was terrifying to see. We came back, we went back to Jerusalem, and I saw my parents standing there in Arnon HaNetziv [an Israeli settlement in East Jerusalem], next to Jabel Mukaber [a Palestinian neighbourhood], and I saw them, and I remember being – feeling happiness, because I came back from a place where you can’t imagine what happened there and you see your family and your parents who love you and you understand how wonderful your life is. Poland was not fun at all. It’s my grandparents, they were there, in Auschwitz.

Yuval was reticent to share stories about his grandparents’ experiences or to talk about the Holocaust in depth. (“I want to talk about happy things.”) In the only overt story he tells about the Holocaust he presents the listener with a stark visual diptych: his grandparents behind barbed wire in Auschwitz, and his parents awaiting his return in Jerusalem. Some of his phrasing – “You come back from a place where you can’t imagine what happened and you see your family…” – is murky, with the listener unable to tell whether Yuval is referring to his mental image of his grandparents in the camp or to the first glimpse of his parents standing in the city where he was born. This blurring of the two demonstrates the significance that the Holocaust has for his sense of self. Young people in Aida held a similar consciousness about the Nakba: in our first storytelling session as a group, when I invited them to introduce themselves, they gave their names and stated where they were from. “I’m from Walaja.” “I’m from Beit Jibrin.” “I’m from Sataf.” Their first act was to indicate where they belonged on a mental map of destroyed villages and depopulated urban neighbourhoods in which they have never set foot, but which supersede their literal birthplace. In doing this, they made the Nakba the bedrock of all the stories they told over the months I visited them.

Whenever memories of mass violence become intertwined with origin stories, whether personal or national, the taboos attached to them are strengthened. This leads to a competitive approach to remembering, evident in ‘The Contaminated Paradise’, an essay in
which the Israeli scholar Nura Yuval-Davis describes how a relationship with a Palestinian refugee now living in Britain brought her into conflict with childhood memories:

He told me that he found children a problem and did not ever intend to have children of his own...And then it came out. His mother had abandoned him during the 1948 war. She ran away when the Jewish forces advanced towards the village, and left him, a four-year-old child, behind. He was rescued by other family members and grew up in a different neighbouring Arab country than the one she fled to.

“Which village was it,” I asked unsuspectingly.

“Oh, you might not know it, it doesn’t exist anymore. A fishing village...Tantura.”

...Tantura – where I learnt to swim in the sea, learnt the joy of empowerment and freedom, swimming in the deep but calm waters towards Seagull Islet...Tantura, where I experienced a sense of adventure exploring all the ruins – Palestinian and Roman (there was an ancient port there) – in and outside the water, accepting them both unquestioningly as naturalised relics of the past; where I escaped to a shady corner in the bustan, eating grapes and reading a favourite book; where my parents stopped being harassed, stressed city people and became fun people.

Tantura – my childhood paradise.

I could never again meet my Palestinian lover after that night. The child in me hated him. He invaded, dispossessed, tainted Tantura. (Abdo and Lentin 2002:256)

For both Yuval-Davis and Rafiq, her ex-partner, Tantura’s ruins embody formative childhood experiences: for Rafiq they represent the violence that led him to reject parenthood, for Yuval-Davis they were part of Eden, the locus of origin stories. Recalling her playful interaction with these “naturalized relics of the past” in light of Rafiq’s story makes it impossible for her to retain Eden. The Nakba has contaminated her personal origin mythos, with Rafiq paradoxically becoming an invader. Significantly the essay contains no further dialogue between the couple. Rafiq’s last words remain, “Tantura, a fishing village.” Yuval-Davis’s instinctive reaction to those words is to write him out of the remainder of the story.

The Nakba’s threatening encroachment is also a theme in Noam Chayut’s autobiography The Girl Who Stole My Holocaust. Chayut never uses the term ‘Nakba’, but instead writes a forest fable whose fantastical quality sets it apart from the rest of the memoir, creating a narrative rupture. He inserts it into a chapter on a cross-country hike, immediately following a conversation with a Bedouin man who was displaced in 1948:

For the past millennia, only a few pines grew in the Jerusalem hills, their provenance unknown. But the pine trees commonly seen in the Jewish National Fund-planted woods were imported from Europe...The oak, pistachio, buckthorn, and hawthorn – indigenous Mediterranean trees – live side by side in a competitive interrelationship, as in every society, each fighting for its own place but also living in harmony with its
surroundings and neighbours…Not so the pine. It does not allow the local vegetation to live in its midst.

…

However, the pine tree burns easily because of the flammable resin flowing in its veins. When ignited, it burns and disappears just as fast as it took over its new territory. But the pine has one more unique trait: right after the fire, its seeds sprout in huge quantities. The fire destroys the woods and everything in it. Numerous other seeds that have so far been locked under the toxic needles lose their vitality in the heat and die. Not so the pine seeds…In a forest fire, the intense heat opens up the cone and revives the seed, bringing it back to life.

This wondrous biological feature enables our friend the pine to come alive out of the flames and reconstruct its home and territory, whose gates are closed to all others. (Chayut 2013:150, 151-152)

The Holocaust and Nakba are encoded in this fable, with the forest fires obliquely referencing the Nazi slaughter and invoking the nationalist imagery of rebirth in Israel that is central to Chayut’s account of his childhood. But the pines planted in vast numbers by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), instead of being uncomplicated symbols of survival and hope, assume a sinister quality: they have choked out indigenous vegetation. The JNF’s government-sponsored practice of planting trees to disguise traces of former Palestinian habitation and to confiscate farmland is well-established (Benvenisti 2002; Pappé 2006), and the national parks and nature reserves that cover the sites of depopulated villages are sometimes dedicated to the memory of Holocaust victims. While Chayut treats the histories as related (the burning led directly to the release of the pine seeds that have subsequently prevented other plants from “living in their midst”), the memories are presented as struggling for dominance in public space.

As discussed in Chapter 3, forests are central to European oral folk culture, particularly fairy tale. (Maitland 2013) Although forests are less common in Middle Eastern landscapes, they still make an appearance in folklore and are imbued with similar tropes, as in the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, whose hero ventures into a forest to slay a monster. Children who enter such dark spaces risk their lives and must use their ingenuity to escape Red Riding Hood’s wolf, the witch in the gingerbread cottage, Baba Yaga. “The girl and the wolf inhabit a place, call it the forest or call it the human psyche, where the spectrum of human sagas converges and their social and cultural meanings play out.” (Orenstein 2002:8) Forests are the cultural origins of terror and uncertainty, figuring large in Eva Hoffman’s mental reconstructions of her parents’ Holocaust experiences in Poland. In the forests of Israel/Palestine, to which Polish trees have been transplanted, Nakba and Holocaust memory form the unseen dangers facing passers-by. As forbidden histories are embedded in
Israel/Palestine’s physical landscape, it is easy to view acknowledgment of the ‘other’ history as a treacherous territorial concession, one that becomes even more perilous when one’s own collective history of mass violence is intimately intertwined with personal stories of birth, family, and ultimately selfhood.

In such a context, self-preservation requires ever starker distinction to be drawn between girl and wolf, hero and villain, perpetrator and victim, good and evil, a process that contributes to competitive victimhood and entrenches taboos. Yet further readings of the young people’s stories reveal that the convergence of histories does not always precipitate a defensive or proprietorial response. Antagonism can be mingled with empathy, while a riptide of curiosity flows beneath reluctance to listen. Now we will examine young people’s stories to see where this ambivalence and ambiguity become apparent.

“Not the real history”: truth, empathy, and typologies of taboo memory

Having placed the Holocaust at the heart of her storytelling, Noga demonstrates awareness that Palestinians might view the Nakba as similarly significant to their own stories. However, she is critical of this significance: “When they talk about the Nakba I think…they want to bring back the past. You can’t keep being stuck in the 1948 war. They’re still refugees, I think only the Palestinians keep being refugees, and they give it to their children and their grandchildren.” She does not appear to register the dissonance between how she narrates the Holocaust’s role in her life (as a formative event that overshadows her daily life and impels her to visit a continent that her Mizrahi family never inhabited) and how she treats the Nakba’s place in the lives of her Palestinian peers (an impractical obsession over an event that ought to be left in the past). She does note her hostile reaction to the idea of Nakba – “That word antagonizes me because it’s not the real history” – and as seen in the previous chapter, over the course of her storytelling she moves between denial, defensive acknowledgement, and empathy with Palestinian experience: “If you think like a Palestinian, if you are a Palestinian, it was real.” With that closing sentence, she both raises questions about what it means for a history to be real and introduces the idea that there exist multiple histories. This idea is taken up explicitly by Budour:

I think that each one has his different history, and it affects each one of us in a very similar way, but the history is different, and that’s why it’s very hard to talk about it and find a solution, because the stories don’t always match. And it’s always – it hurts when you hear about your grandfather crying because he doesn’t have his lands any more, and he’s not living with his relatives any more, and – these are all stories that really affect you, and like – the Nakba is very important to me. Even though it
happened many years ago and I haven’t experienced it, I feel like it’s a very big part of me. I think this is a very big part of the conflict, and why it’s hard to solve it, because each one of us sees it and connects to the story in a very different way. So it’s very hard to find a place where everyone agrees.

Recognizing the existence of multiple histories and acknowledging that people interact with the stories in varied and ambivalent ways makes it possible to acknowledge the significance carried by forbidden histories without feeling that they negate the teller’s own experiences. This is vital in a country where young people describe those histories as “strong in me” or as “part of me”, as a refusal to listen to the ‘other’ story can be read as a denial of the storyteller’s selfhood. A distinctive feature of Rafael’s storytelling is that he identifies both the Holocaust and the Nakba as integral to his own story, revealing a tessellation between the histories:

We started learning Nakba since preschool, but it was never something informative, you know – it was basically a day that we knew is sad and we knew it’s about Palestine. I think I first became conscious of that in maybe fourth or fifth grade, and they came in and they told stories of what happened…Relatives of the kids from school, parents and grandparents, and they would come and tell stories…And where I live – you see Arab houses, especially in Emek Refaim Street, you can see the houses – authentic Arab houses, and you think, well – especially going to our school, when you hear all the stories of how the soldiers came and banished the people away and started living there, you think, well, who lived here seventy years ago and what happened to that family and where are they now? Are they dead? Did they flee to Jordan? Did they move? … Sometimes you go and you see Arab houses and you think, “What happened there.”

In describing the Holocaust as “a big part of my family”, Rafael accords it intimate status, almost that of a relative, and emphasizes that he was conscious of its presence in the home before he was fully aware of its meaning. If Holocaust memory is resident in his home, Nakba memory imbues the physical fabric of his neighbourhood. His perception of that neighbourhood has been shaped by “all the stories of how the soldiers came” that he has heard at school, the other community in which he passes a large amount of time. In Rafael’s storytelling, Nakba memory is embodied by streets that are inhabited by memories of the Holocaust. Merely opening the front door leads from one history into the other. Before describing the neighbourhood’s traditional stone buildings and wondering about their former owners, he clarifies, “My house is modern,” as if to distance it from a history that he presents as very close.

In discussing the Holocaust, Rafael uses the first person and intersperses political commentary on its place in Israeli society with family stories about relatives who perished.
For the Nakba he uses second person, which could be read as a distancing technique, an invitation to the listener to consider Palestinian houses alongside him (a personal ‘you’), or a suggestion that his questions on seeing the houses are in fact common if not publicly articulated (generic ‘you’). Although a linguistic analysis of his storytelling reveals that he does talk about these histories in a different way, it is clear that he is comfortable with exploring both of them through story, whether as teller or as listener. He attributes this to awareness of how Holocaust memory can elicit Nakba stories and vice versa, enriching rather than erasing one another:

[Y]ou can say it’s about Israel, because of the Holocaust we have Israel, and people often associate the Holocaust with Israel. I don’t see it that way. I think the Holocaust was something about religion, you know, the Jewish people, not the Israeli people. You don’t mention Israel in the Holocaust Memorial Day [at Yad b’Yad]. You mention what happened, you know before Israel even existed, and you mention what happened to the Jewish people, so it’s way easier to – the Palestinian youths can relate to that. Also, we share stories, the Jewish kids share stories, and they say, “Wow, that sounds like a story I have from my side about the Nakba” and sometimes it would remind the Palestinian youth about the Nakba. So it’s easier to relate…I know sometimes people from the outside, if they hear about comparing Shoah, Nakba, they would say no, don’t compare. There’s a very large taboo about the Holocaust, and you know you can’t compare to anything, you can’t compare it, don’t talk about it, which I completely disagree with because even when you do compare something, you compare the behaviour of what happened. You don’t compare the actual historical event, you compare the behaviour of someone banishing you from your home and wanting to come back. Maybe that’s a platform where Palestinians and Israelis can be – I don’t know, share stories or even get closer, because you know we both had families and then someone banished us and we couldn’t go back.

This is the preface to the family stories that Rafael shared about the Holocaust. He begins by questioning the origin story that connects Israel to the genocide, reframing it as a question of Jewish experience in order to make it more accessible to Palestinians, before emphasizing the importance of personal story in the transmission of taboo memory. Interestingly, given that many of his relatives did not survive, the image he uses for the Holocaust – “someone banishing you from your home and wanting to come back” – does not reference murder, but expulsion and yearning. This suggests that the stories he has heard about the Nakba affect the way he retells his family’s Holocaust experiences. He does not share specific stories about the Nakba, but instead describes a set of themes that he has absorbed over his childhood:

I remember a few stories that were something like, the soldiers came and they had to flee, or they were banished. So they would grab everything they could and go away, and then they would have this kind of hope to come back, and then they would try to come back two years after and they would see a Jewish family living in their house.
And they would say, “It’s my home, can I live here now? I mean, it’s my home,” and the Jewish family would say “It’s not my problem,” and basically sometimes even sleep in the same beds they slept in. So I don’t remember a particular story, but just the general kind of pattern that was in all the stories, you know – wanting to come back and even when coming back you couldn’t do anything about it.

The typology that distinguishes his awareness of the Nakba – expulsion, powerlessness, and being on the outside looking into a former home – is present in Rafael’s Holocaust stories, as we will see. His repeated statements about being unable to “come back” could refer to the impossibility of going back in time to restore what was obliterated in the Holocaust, not just the Palestinian refugees’ struggle for the right of return. The idea of banishment becomes a poignant metaphor for the remoteness of the past and the loss of the people who lived then. This prompts him to concentrate on the possibility of establishing justice in the present, based on shared grief for what cannot be undone. Similarly, Budour recognizes that while the expulsion or killing of her great-uncle Kamal is a “different history” from the deportation and murder of Rafael’s relatives, “it affects us in a very similar way.” Differentiating between the event and its aftermath enables a more empathetic response to emerge.

Yuval’s stories about observing military checkpoints provide another powerful example of memory’s multidirectional quality:

It’s sad, it’s not a good thing, when I say this I’m really not proud of the things I say, it’s shame on us, but I think we’re trying to be better and better all the time, but the Arabs, most of the work they do is construction or in the supermarket, and if you drive at five in the morning, even before sunrise, when you’re near the checkpoints here, you’ll see – when I go on trips, you can see a lot of Arabs in lines, people who came to Israel to work. Trucks came, and they’re put in trucks. Something like – it sounds horrible, how I describe it. It’s not horrible. Trucks come and take them to work, and then put them back in Palestine, and that’s – I guess it’s a problem. You have to admit it, we have a big problem here.

Here Yuval’s usually measured speech becomes agitated. He speeds up, occasionally stumbling over words. Elsewhere he makes it clear that he sees Israeli employment of Palestinians as positive; the source of his disquiet is the sight of “Arabs in lines” being “put in trucks”, which he describes as “sad”, “not a good thing”, and “a shame on us”, before retracting his unease with, “It’s not horrible.” Chapter 3 explored the figurative lexicons that young people use to interpret the landscapes that surround them; lines and trucks are clearly part of Yuval’s own lexicon, allowing him to interpret the Palestinian labourers’ present through the prism of his family’s past. This shows the ambivalence with which young people approach memory: as Rafael’s and Amal’s stories indicate in different ways, the idea that the
Holocaust and the Nakba could be connected in any way is often disavowed publicly. While that disavowal might be sincere, attention to the symbolic lexicon shows that young people’s engagement with the past is multi-layered – the connection that Yuval draws between his grandparents and the Palestinian labourers is equally sincere. The oscillation in this story illustrates that he is simultaneously distancing the workers’ lives from his family history and drawing them closer. He appears to be reassuring himself with, “[Trucks] put them back in Palestine, and that’s…” Given the centrality of Holocaust memory to how he views his life and his family, it is probable that this unfinished sentence, his agitation, and the unspoken comparison all lead to a line in a forced labour camp, or a truck delivering human cargo to the gas chambers. Without elaborating, Yuval then pairs “It’s not horrible” with, “We have a big problem here.” His rapid movement between horror, shame, rationalization, and an acknowledgement of injustice magnifies the dynamic that is present in many of the young people’s stories.

Stav and Nurit are descended from a family that was almost entirely obliterated in the Holocaust, something I knew before I met them. However, they did not give the Holocaust as one of their significant life events; and while most other Israeli participants were quick to introduce the subject, it did not enter their storytelling until comparatively late on. Stav arrived at the Holocaust through describing the military incursion into Gaza in summer 2014 (Operation Protective Edge):

Egypt closed their gates. They [Gazans] can’t go there. Of course they won’t let them go into Israel after – when there’s a war, and like, they’re not supposed to swim for their lives. And yeah, it’s a problem, but we can’t deal with the whole world’s problems, we have enough problems in a tiny little country. And like, I think we had to defend ourselves not as a country for many years, and all around the history there wasn’t a time when Jews were fine with everyone and nobody hurt Jews, and nobody – and there was the Second World War, where were they, did they come and save us, did they tell us, “Come to Israel and live with us”? No, when we came to Israel nobody let us in, and people who starved – nobody helped us back then, and they’re supposed to have defenders who don’t spend money on rockets to throw at us, they should find them a place, build them safer places…

Stav spoke rapidly, her words blurring on the voice recorder, worry over Palestinian welfare clashing with a bitterly voiced, “When we came to Israel nobody let us in…” This story contains several discordant notes. She acknowledges that it is impossible to leave Gaza, delineating each sealed border in turn: “Egypt closed their gates…[T]hey won’t let them go into Israel…[T]hey’re not supposed to swim for their lives.” The narrative sequence reflects the hermetic sealing of Gaza’s borders under siege and the impossibility of escape, but
paradoxically she then charges Gaza’s unnamed “defenders” (this was the only time an Israeli teenager suggested that Hamas paramilitaries might perform a defensive role) with the responsibility to “find them a place.” Significantly this follows her description of Jewish refugees’ struggle to find sanctuary, a struggle in which she includes herself through her use of first-person plural: “No, when we came to Israel nobody let us in… nobody helped us back then…” The structure suggests that Palestinians in Gaza ought to undergo a similar solitary struggle to reach “safer places”, and the profoundly personal nature of that “we” leads her to connect the siege on Gaza with British governmental quotas imposed on Jewish immigration in Mandatory Palestine. While on one level she justifies the siege, this comparison introduces a note of uncertainty, as she recognizes the quotas were unjust and fatal – the implication is that the siege is a natural consequence of failure to help during the Holocaust, perhaps even retaliatory in nature.

At other points in her storytelling, her perception shifts dramatically. Concern appears to be the dominant emotion, paired with a sense of powerlessness, and the idea of the Gazan death toll as the logical consequence of historic Palestinian refusal to welcome Holocaust survivors is supplanted by criticism of Palestinian paramilitaries, which leads to criticism of the Israeli government:

> I think it’s very upsetting that little kids there and kids and – and – and they don’t tell their parents to go and throw rockets at Jews, and they have to get hurt and die and stuff like that. It’s upsetting that they have to suffer, it’s just like, I’m not saying, like, I didn’t hear of any [Israeli] kids dying in the last war in Israel, but we couldn’t do anything because we were stuck at home because we were scared and it wasn’t our fault. It was the Israeli Defence Ministry’s fault.

Blame shifts several times, and with it the meaning of “we” alters. When Stav talks about the Holocaust, “we” might refer to her family, to Holocaust survivors, or to Jewish people as a whole. Here she refers to herself and her sister (“We couldn’t do anything because we were stuck at home…”), and by reducing that “we” to the two of them, she dismantles the sharp us-and-them dialectic that characterized her initial discussion of Gaza. Elsewhere she describes Gazan youth as “stuck” and “scared”, which suggests that she is not simply referring to herself and Nurit in the story above, but to age-related peers who share these emotions. Her stories move rapidly between polarizing and narrow definitions of community and more inclusive and empathetic ideas, with the memory of herself and Nurit afraid at home effecting the switch.
In Yara’s storytelling the idea of home and household is also crucial to the articulation of empathy:

[My father] started to tell me about the Holocaust, and to tell me that Jews suffered a lot when they were in Germany and in Europe…So my father told me, “These are maybe some of the reasons why they are doing this right now with us, because they suffered a lot in Europe.” … Maybe it’s something in every human, if someone does this thing to him he has to have revenge, maybe he can’t do it to the same person, but he has to do it to another people. And I see that with my mum sometimes. Like she is fed up, she hates her boss, and her boss doesn’t like my mother, so she keeps saying things that annoy my mother and sometimes my mother comes home upset and she expresses this anger at me and my brother. Like, “You should do this, you should do that!” and she starts shouting and screaming. This is when I realized, when [my father] told me that they tried to make people suffer because they suffered.

Yara and Stav both collapse time in their storytelling. Stav implies that Palestinians in contemporary Gaza are connected to Jewish suffering during the Holocaust, while Yara uses the Holocaust to interpret the behaviour and attitudes of present-day Israelis, suggesting that there is a tangible link between the Holocaust and her day-to-day experiences under military occupation. Such collapses in time can be read as anti-Semitic or anti-Palestinian, as they imply an indelible collective guilt. However, it is clear from the girls’ storytelling as a whole that they are not concerned with blame, but with how to navigate events that cannot always be talked about openly. Yara was shaken by the scale of the Holocaust (“My father, he asked me do you know how many Jews were killed in the Holocaust…I told him six thousand, and it was six million…”). In grappling with its immensity, she transposes it onto her four-person family, seeing Israeli fear and anger in the behaviour of her exasperated mother. As her father is Dutch, and keen to share the wartime history of his own family, Yara’s household has become the place where she can most safely engage with forbidden histories. This encourages her to use her family dynamics as a template for understanding the Holocaust’s repercussions. Similarly, Stav is better able to explore the experiences of Gazan youth when she is alone with Nurit, and she uses their experiences of being “stuck at home” as a way to understand life under siege.

Trying to make sense of temporally or spatially distant suffering within the confines of the home can admittedly lead to a minimization of the events’ significance and scope. Rather than transposing forbidden histories onto smaller domestic spaces, focusing on distances may foster more empathetic and less daunting encounters with such histories. Stav and Yara’s stories both involve distancing as well as the shrinking of space. Unlike other
Palestinian participants, Yara does not draw any direct parallel between the Holocaust and the Nakba, saying that this is impossible for her due to her own circumstances:

If you have lived these situations – you see that [other] people are living in these situations, you can understand them and feel them…you have this contact with other people, you understand how they think and how they feel, because you have lived the same thing that they have lived…For me, it’s not the same feeling, because [Palestinian refugees] are still alive, but they were pushed out. In the Holocaust they were almost all killed. So I feel sorry about both of them, but for me, I don’t really have someone that died because of the Nakba or the Naksa [1967 war] or even an Intifada, but if there was a member of my family who died because of these situations, I think I would feel the exact same way as the Jews felt. But for me, it’s hard for me to imagine.

Yara begins by establishing the difference between the Holocaust and the Nakba (physical extermination versus ethnic cleansing), which she also views through the prism of her family’s experiences: she feels unable to comprehend collective Jewish grief because she herself has not been violently bereaved. The missing six million lives and the enormity of that loss make Yara feel more remote from Jewish experience: “You have this contact with other people…because you have lived the same thing that they have lived…” Her recognition of the limits of her personal understanding stems from that sense of distance, and the attendant idea that it deprives her of contact with peers like Stav. Acknowledgment that full understanding is not possible enables her expression of compassion: “I feel sorry about both of them.”

Distance (and the absence it implies) performs a similar function in Stav’s storytelling. Her story would unsettle many listeners for different reasons: the suggestion that Gazan suffering is connected to Palestinian attitudes towards the Holocaust, and the responsibility she then assigns to the Israeli government for Gazan deaths. As I listened, I resisted the urge to query her on these points. When I transcribed the recording, I was struck by her rhetorical question: “Where were they, did they come and save us, did they tell us, ‘Come to Israel and live with us?’” as this question appears to be the unifying note that holds an otherwise discordant narrative together. At other points in her narrative, “Where were they?” becomes “Where are they?” as she struggles to identify the closest Palestinian community to her home. The question also encompasses her disapproval of segregation: “I really don’t know any kids my age who are Arab, not one, not any…And I think it’s wrong to separate kids so much.” Although she rejects the idea of Palestinians from Gaza being permitted to enter Israel (“We can’t deal with the whole world’s problems, we have enough
problems in a tiny little country”), presenting Gaza as a faraway place, she expresses a belief in integrated education several times. This demonstrates that even confrontational stories still communicate with one another: the angry, “Where were they?” that arises in relation to the Holocaust takes on a different tone when applied to a classroom from which Arabs are absent: “I think – I don’t think that’s right.”

That classroom was the image Stav and Nurit left me with at the end of our last meeting, when I asked them what associations they had with the word ‘Nakba’. They were visibly perplexed. Stav responded, “Yeah, I know it, but not too much.” Nurit, shaking her head, asked, “Which?” Stav added: “Like, I know it’s to do with Muslim religion or community or…” before trailing off. I ended the session there. Stav was apologetic over her uncertainty: “It’s because we go to a religious Jewish school. We don’t learn enough about other people’s holidays.”

As she is growing up in a bilingual integrated village in which both Holocaust and Nakba are formally commemorated, the stories Budour tells about forbidden history engage with it openly, although they are still rich in symbol. Refugees are central to her personal lexicon. She considers the Holocaust and Nakba in parallel with the experiences of African refugees in present-day Israel:

Every [Holocaust] story’s very hard for me to hear about, and we have a lot of immigrants coming to this country now from Africa. And the country is preventing them from coming. And when someone comes from Sudan, according to the law, not the law in Israel but in the UN, he’s immediately a palit. [Hebrew: refugee] So this is a topic that I really care about. And when they don’t accept them, that makes me very mad, because I believe that these people have a right to come here. Which also kind of crashes with the story about the Jewish people coming here and the Arabs not exactly wanting them to be here…So yes, there are stories – I think that the Holocaust is a story that affects me in many ways, that gives me, that makes me have bikoret [Hebrew: criticism] about both sides. About a side that wouldn’t welcome people who needed help, and about a side that when they didn’t get the help, they harmed that people in a very harsh way. They didn’t put them in gas showers and kill six million of them, but yes, they killed some of them and yes, they kicked out some of them, like the Jewish people had experienced a lot of in their history. So it’s kind of weird for me to learn about it all the time in school, and of course they don’t teach about the things that happened in 48 or in 67. “There was a war, we won” – that’s it. So when I hear how the stories crash, it’s just – I don’t understand…

Budour’s frustration at how Holocaust memory does not automatically translate into compassionate justice for Palestinians echoes through the stories of almost all the Palestinians who took part, notably Amal, Yara, and the teenagers in Aida camp. They treat Holocaust memory as an ethical demand that must be answered. Budour goes further, voicing disquiet
over Palestinian rejection of Jews trying to flee the Holocaust. This subversion of competitive victimhood is made possible by the appearance of Sudanese refugees: her concern over their reception in the Israeli state has led her to question how other refugees were treated in the same region in previous times. This adds alternative meaning to Silverman’s theory of palimpsestic memory: viewing forbidden histories through a layer of more recent stories and memories, particularly stories in which the viewer feels less directly implicated, may make it possible to acknowledge forbidden history openly. The layers have the effect of reducing its painful glare, like smoked glass diluting sunlight: the reaction is no longer antagonistic.

In linking Holocaust survivors in Mandatory Palestine with the pre-state Jewish forces and nascent government that orchestrated the Nakba (“When they didn’t get the help, they harmed that people in a very harsh way”) Budour overstates both their demographic and political strength in 1948. Survivors constituted a marginalized group in the pre-state yishuv and were viewed with suspicion by its political elites, who felt that their inability to resist denoted physical and psychological weaknesses incompatible with the nationalist project. (Segev 2000) However, while her conflation of Holocaust survivors with the nascent state may be at odds with “the real history”, it is faithful to the collective memory held by Noga and many of her peers, who do view Holocaust survivors as Israel’s pioneers and reason for existing. This is a common pattern in Israeli society; one study of trainee teachers in Israel found that 80% associated Israeli collective identity with Holocaust survivors. (Walker and Lambert 2013) Budour affirms the Holocaust’s significance in her Jewish peers’ lives while drawing attention to its discordant “crash” with the Nakba, which she hears as an ethical imperative to welcome displaced people. So while the young people interact with forbidden histories in dramatically different ways, there are clear points of convergence.

These are most vivid in Rafael’s storytelling about how his family arrived in Israel/Palestine, which encapsulates a multidirectional approach to taboo memory. The Holocaust, the Nakba, and the Mizrahi Jews’ experiences of persecution in other Arab countries enter into dialogue with one another. Mizrahi Jews faced linguistic and cultural suppression when they arrived in the nascent state of Israel, in a state-sponsored and largely successful effort to cast Jewishness and Arabness as antonyms. (Alcalay 1993; Shohat 1999) The possibility of Arab-Jewish cultural life is emphatically denied; its memory is taboo. (Shohat 2006) When speaking about Mizrahi experience with Palestinians, a statement I heard frequently was, “Jews and Arabs lived in peace before the Zionists,” an avoidance of the precariousness that accompanies minority status and a means of distancing the speaker from Mizrahi experiences of dispossession. Rafael’s stories – told in three languages that he
claims as his own – breach these taboos. A theme that appears in all the stories is the idea of a truncated journey:

My second name, which is Jacob, is after my grandfather’s brother, who almost got out, I mean he almost was saved, and he went on a ship on the way from Romania to Israel, which was actually Palestine there, back then, and the Russians thought it was a Nazi ship so they sank it. And he has another brother who was basically shot in the train station. And my grandmother’s side, it’s harder. There were ten children. Six of them were murdered in the Holocaust. And she had a twin sister, she and her twin were the youngest, and Mengele took them…And she was saved because of that. She was going to get killed in the selection, Mengele was, you know, selecting you go to work and you go to die, and their older sister came to Mengele and told him, “Why are you separating them, they’re twins.” And he heard about it and took them to his cabin, and that’s how they were saved.

My grandmother on my mother’s side actually got stuck here in 1948. They used to come to Palestine from Yemen because they were merchants, and then Israel was created and they couldn’t get back. So her father specifically did live in Israel, although the family itself lived in Aden, so they did have a house here. But they were very poor…So she grew up in Israel, basically, even though she was born in Aden.

The interjection from Rafael’s great-aunt at the selection ramp in Birkenau brought an unexpected end to his grandmother’s journey to the gas chambers. (The great-aunt herself perished.) The creation of the state of Israel terminated Rafael’s maternal grandmother’s journeys to and from Yemen, cutting her off from her birthplace and numerous relatives. These stories illuminate Rafael’s engagement with the Nakba. He recounts several stories of internally displaced Palestinians trying to make the journey home, which always ends at a closed door. As with his Yemeni grandmother, an unpassable distance has opened up between their current location and their former home. Rafael is preoccupied with closing distances through his storytelling, as seen before: “[S]omeone banishing you from your home and wanting to come back. Maybe that’s a platform where Palestinians and Israelis can…share stories or even get closer, because you know we both had families and…we couldn’t go back.” The phrase “get closer” takes on new meaning when we revisit the Nakba stories that Rafael told first in light of the family stories that he told subsequently. Through these stories, which are lined with interrupted journeys, Rafael is attempting to find narrative completion for journeys that family members had to leave unfinished. Amal is engaged in a similar searching journey:

I don’t feel home yet anywhere. I’m hoping to find home somewhere…I’m a bit stuck. It’s funny that my family issue, a lot of times I compare it to the Palestinian issue, and the refugees. Because they’re kind of stuck in the middle. They don’t have
a home, a place they can call home. OK, they physically live here in Dheisheh, they physically live in Bethlehem, just like I live in my father’s house, and they feel a bit comfortable in the camp, just like I feel comfortable in my room, but still, they’re not here and they’re not there. They can’t go back. I can’t go back to the whole family I used to have before the divorce. Like, we weren’t a great family, but – I think the refugees, and myself – maybe that’s why I identify a lot with refugees. They’re stuck and I’m stuck. And I’m waiting to find home, just like the Palestinians are waiting to find home. Because home is not about having a house and living on the land, it’s more abstract, and you can’t just grab it.

Like Stav, Yara, several young people in Aida camp, and Maayan, a 12-year-old girl from a Gush Etzion settlement whose stories are structured round her parents’ divorce, Amal uses her own family experiences as a way to navigate historic violence and forbidden histories. The familiar happenings of day-to-day life provide a means to interpret spatially and temporally distant events, and in the case of forbidden histories, using everyday stories as a compass renders the unfamiliar terrain less hostile. This also works in reverse: Amal’s strong political awareness and the pride she takes in her refugee identity makes her home life more bearable, as she narrates the personal in the political terms that she finds most meaningful.

As Budour and Rafael make clear in stories about their school experiences, the Nakba has no open place in the lives of most young Israeli Jews, as it is not formally taught; and as seen in Chapter 3, it is rare for Palestinians to encounter the Holocaust before the teenage years, and only then if they inhabit certain areas. However, this lack of knowledge is accompanied by an awareness that unknown stories exist. Although it was clearly challenging for them to expose themselves to Palestinian memory and experience, Stav and Nurit were drawn to those unknowns. A similar dynamic is seen in the fascination that the everyday lives of Israelis exercised over youth in Bethlehem and Aida camp, and the way in which Palestinian and Israeli youth in Hebron were occasionally drawn into conversation with each other between insulting salvoes. Having witnessed how their own stories and memories may carry young people into contact with forbidden and hidden histories, and the typologies that distinguish their narration, we will examine the places where the boundary between knowledge and mere awareness is at its thinnest and identify forbidden histories’ points of transmission.

“Until the seventh wave”: the liquid borders of memory

None of the Palestinians I worked with in the Old City of Hebron had heard of the Holocaust, while in the refugee camps it was common knowledge, at least among older participants.
Amal sees this heightened knowledge as part of a general tendency among refugees towards greater political awareness and sensitivity to injustice:

It’s just who we are, and it’s something you can feel everywhere around you…[A]s refugees, we are the people who felt the injustice. I was born with no land. You’re living on the property of the United Nations. You can’t move around because you’re a refugee, and you – wherever you go and whatever you do, you’re still a refugee. You’re still marginalized. You can see the poverty all over the refugee camps. Some people tend to escape the fact that they’re refugees, but I…proudly call myself a refugee because I feel that I am a holder of the cause, instead of someone who’s just – who’s just, you know, an inferior in their society… It’s different from someone who’s coming from the city. When I’m in university I see that people who come from Bethlehem or Beit Jala or Beit Sahour…they don’t know much about what happened in Hebron this morning, or what happened at the whatever checkpoint yesterday. I don’t know why, but I think it’s in the culture…So if something is going on in Hebron or Jericho or Gaza or wherever, we care a lot, and we feel that we have to do something. We can identify with other people’s struggles, because we’re refugees in the first place, and we’ve seen a lot of things that other people didn’t.

When I invited Amal to give examples of these unseen things, she brought up her mother’s experiences in the First Intifada, thereby reiterating the idea that political responsibility and understanding are transmitted through the family (“I am a holder of the cause”). The story she tells invokes a memory that has become contentious in present-day Palestinian society:

My mother was only seventeen, and she was in prison because the soldiers attacked my grandfather. He was very sick and they kicked him and beat him, so she was defending my grandfather, and she got imprisoned. She was very active, and she used to go to marches even though she was a girl. At that time it was very acceptable for girls to go to marches. They were encouraged to go and to organize the whole thing. My mother raised me to be very patriotic and very political.

Amal frequently voices concern and anger that Palestinian women’s political participation is no longer accepted unquestioningly by men, as it was during the First Intifada. She describes how she and her classmates at the girls’ school took to the streets spontaneously to protest Operation Cast Lead [2008], despite their teachers’ objections. By doing so, they invoke the memory of the First Intifada and use it to reclaim political space in the present day. Amal attributes her decision to do this to the strong political consciousness that she imbibed from her refugee mother, which will not allow her to assume an auxiliary role. This willingness to breach taboos extends to her engagement with Israeli Jewish collective memory, although at first she was careful to disclaim any relationship with the Holocaust, despite her repeated assertion that living as a refugee grants insight into “other people’s struggles.” As Noga did
over the Nakba, Amal stated that mention of the Holocaust made her angry. Again, like
Noga, her antagonism was shot through with uncertain empathy:

In both cases [Holocaust and Nakba] it’s very complicated and not easy to – even to
live with. It’s not something that can be natural. Never, never. I don’t know. [Pause]
It’s not something you can get over. I don’t know. I can’t just – it’s not easy to look
forward. Because of my family situation and political situation, it’s not easy to foresee
the future, because there are so many restrictions and surprises and complications. So
you have to fight every day, each day by day. It’s tiring, but that’s – that’s how we
should – that’s the only way.

Amal’s usual poise and fluency are replaced here by halting, hesitant sentences that verge on
the cryptic, punctuated by frequent pauses. “I can’t just – it’s not easy to look forward,”
suggests that she sees engagement with forbidden history as part of “looking forward.” She
does not elaborate on what this might mean, but presents it as a tiring struggle that has to be
fought in increments, “day by day.” It is unclear to whom she is referring when she says,
“That’s how we should – that’s the only way…” To people affected by “both cases”,
including Israelis, to Palestinians, or only to fellow refugees? Respecting her obvious
discomfort, I did not press her on this. She later returned to the topic of her own volition, with
the vague “It’s not something you can get over” assuming a more concrete form: “I think the
Jews are traumatized by the Holocaust.” Her frank admission of anger, paired with the way
she resolutely inched closer and closer to the topic that had aroused it, are perhaps an
illustration of what she means by “fighting every day, each day by day…” As a refugee,
living with almost nightly army incursions in the camp and routine discrimination, she is
willing to take more figurative risks by placing herself in the buffer zone between Israeli
Jewish and Palestinian memory, exposing herself to the incursions of forbidden history.

Yuval also positions himself in that buffer zone. Unlike Nurit, Stav, and many other
Israeli participants living within the Green Line, he had heard of the Nakba. I asked how and
when he had become aware of it:

I don’t know. I don’t know when. I’m more close to the Arabs in here, so I know what
it is. [Long pause] When you live close to someone, you – first of all, I believe that I
will know more and I will understand more, and everyone will understand and know
more in this complicated situation. There will be less hatred and people who can’t talk
to each other. So I try to know things. I don’t know when I knew it – about the Nakba,
but it’s the chance for attacks or something like this, and I live in here and someone
might attack me [laughs], so it is more obvious from in here.

‘In here’ is Yuval’s terminology for settlements in the West Bank, whose residents ordinarily
lead sharply separated lives from their Palestinian neighbours. Yuval acknowledges the
degree of segregation several times (“There is some connection, but a real connection there isn’t”) and comments ruefully that he has no opportunity to meet Palestinian neighbours. “It’s not like I can go to play basketball with them.” Paradoxically he attributes his knowledge of the Nakba to inter-community closeness, which he does not believe exists within the Green Line: “I’m more close to the Arabs in here, so I know what it is.” This enhanced knowledge is produced partly through friction, namely by an increased risk of being targeted in Nakba Day protests; and partly by a desire to know, stemming from the belief that knowing Palestinian stories will mean fewer “people who can’t talk to each other.” How Yuval has acquired his knowledge of the Nakba (and his view of such knowledge as essential to reducing hatred) without having contact with Palestinians remains unclear. He himself is unsure, seeing the Nakba as a feature of his immediate environment that he registered without realizing.

As seen previously, place is central to the transmission of forbidden histories, with young people’s homes, present-day Israeli neighbourhoods featuring traditional Palestinian architecture, refugee camps, and the occupied West Bank emerging as the chief sites of transmission and encounter. Place can also elicit or suppress empathy, something that is strongly apparent in Yara’s storytelling. She is one of few participants to own hatred: “I hate Israelis. Maybe if they started to think of a peaceful way to end this, I will start to like them, but until then I’ll hate them.” However, this declaration of hatred was made in between stories of the checkpoint and army violence during the Second Intifada; empathy emerges when she is relating stories from the family home. Laughing, she describes how an aunt offered soldiers hot chocolate when they requisitioned the house, emphasizing the act of hospitality over the army incursion in a way that allows her to retain control of her living space and the stories that unfold there. Her approach to Israeli people, and by extension their collective memory, is heavily influenced by place. Liquid-like, forbidden history is able to enter some spaces but not others, leaving compassion, hostility, or both in its wake.

Yad b’Yad and Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom are places where story-sharing is actively encouraged. As an Arab Jew, drawing on two heritages that are frequently pitted against one another, Rafael is sensitive to the possessively territorial approach to memory, grounded in ethno-nationalist conceptions of place and belonging:

Tunisia, Greece – they’re often ignored. There is a lot of racism from the Ashkenazi Jews towards the Mizrahi Jews. They believe that the Holocaust belongs to them. It wasn’t a lot of North African Jews who went to the Holocaust, like a few thousand, a few dozen thousand, and they’re like a small percentage, and they would say, “Maybe
a few thousand but we had millions.” In a way they do think that – I mean, “The Holocaust is mine,” which is a horrible thing to say, but people think that. Also the way Palestinians say the Nakba is theirs, and Palestinians from Galilee say the Land Day is theirs.

Efforts to de-territorialize the memory of the Holocaust have been met with controversy in Israel/Palestine. The students of Kedma School, an institution with a majority of Mizrahi pupils, attracted protests attended by Israeli politicians when in 1994 it expanded the annual Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony to include the lighting of a seventh candle for victims of other atrocities. Calls were made to the Ministry of Education for the school’s closure. The principal, Sami Shalom Chetrit, reported a phone call from a furious woman who screamed, “You Moroccans have already stolen everything from us, but that’s it! Do not dare to touch the Holocaust. You will not steal the Holocaust from us with your belly dancing.” Critics asserted that as the student body and faculty were predominantly Mizrahi, the school lacked the credibility to draw universalizing lessons from a European Jewish tragedy. (Oppenheimer 2010:305) There is also a similar tendency in Palestinian society to resist discussion of Mizrahi Jewish experience of persecution in Arab lands, partly to avoid being cast as guilty by ethnic association, but also due to fear that a false parity might hamper attempts to secure justice for Palestinian refugees through the implementation of the right of return. (Peteet 2005:223) Competitive victimhood is nurtured here through “an antagonistic complicity of nationalisms” (Lim 2014:47), which posits that a secure national future can only be obtained through denial or minimization of the other’s collective memory.

The border zones delineated in the previous chapter – which emerged as liquid and permeable – are places where nationalist categories of outsider and insider, citizen and stranger, purity and danger start to collapse, with border apparatus such as checkpoints, barbed wire, and separation barriers only serving as a paradoxical reminder that such a collapse is possible. The way in which borders render such categories unstable through their own liquidity has implications for how forbidden histories are narrated. This is made clear in a story told by Budour about the seizure of her family’s land, which is centred on a spatial metaphor:

I know a story about my mother’s grandfather, and she told me that he was very rich, and he had many lands. He owned many lands, and he had many people working in them. He didn’t work in his lands, he just sat at home and got the money, and once the occupation [of 1948] started, he was left with almost nothing. She told me a story that once she went out, and she saw her father collecting tin from the trees [finding scrap metal to sell], and crying, and she always tells me, “We had land even in the sea, to the seventh wave.” She always tells me…And my mother’s story is also that a lot of
her family ran away to Nablus. And my father’s story – his name is Kamal, and he’s named after his uncle who disappeared in the Nakba. And my grandmother, my father’s mother, also has a story but I don’t really remember it. It’s about her father. The only thing I know, because she doesn’t have a great memory, is that her father used to be a sheikh, an imam in a village not so far from Taybeh, and today it’s occupied. But he’s still buried there. And so she went there to see his grave and the people there kicked her out. So people here can’t even go to see their relatives’ graves. [Pause, quieter voice] That’s how deep the conflict is, I think.

On one level the metaphor of the seventh wave is simply used to convey the extensive material loss sustained by Budour’s family. However, it has also entered the structure of her narrative, with her constant repetition of “I know a story...She told me a story…And my mother’s story…And my father’s story…And my grandmother has a story…” simulating the roll of breaking surf, impossible to contain. This imbues the story with a sense of inevitability, intensifying the feeling of loss it imparts. At last the reader is deposited at a graveside, the most traditional site of remembrance, and the wave’s motion becomes suddenly vertical with the reference to depth: “That’s how deep the conflict is, I think.”

This flowing spatial metaphor is reminiscent of Rothberg’s conceptualization of memory as multidirectional, which is at the core of this chapter; and it also underlines the significance of space and place in the transmission of taboo memory. Rothberg and other scholars in the field of memory studies, notably Max Silverman through his metaphor of the palimpsest, have touched on the role of liminality in large-scale cultural transmission of memory through literature and film; this study demonstrates that similar processes are at work on a more localized intimate level, in the day to day lives of conflict-affected youth, inviting us to treat the young people’s stories as part of a much wider literary corpus. Their incorporation into a cultural palimpsest moves our analysis even further away from the psychotherapeutic approach to young people’s storytelling that was critiqued earlier. In delineating recurring characteristics of forbidden history – its traumatic quality, the subaltern status of its narrators, its predominantly oral nature, and the way it runs counter to authorized national narratives – the chapter has provided a framework for a comparative analysis of stories in other situations of political violence, potentially advancing and enriching the multidirectional understanding of memory.

The present chapter also shows that taboo memory contributes to the volatility and violent uncertainty that prevails in places of transmission, as seen in one of the stories with which I opened this work: a Palestinian bus driver who decided to talk back to a Druze checkpoint soldier and who hinted at the existence of another history, pulling the soldier onto unstable ground. The uncertainty generated by what Budour terms “stories that crash” both
reinforces and corrodes the taboos on memory, and uncertainty and ambivalence remain a dominant theme in the Holocaust and Nakba stories shared by almost all the young people. These histories are clearly integral to their imagination of self and community, with Holocaust and Nakba often surfacing without being elicited by the facilitator, and youth treating them as an intimate part of their home life. (“It’s a big part of my family.”)

Participants both reinforce and rework established national boundaries of community in their narration of forbidden histories, seen most sharply in Rafael’s and Yuval’s storytelling. Yuval, in drawing a link between the Holocaust stories that are such an intimate part of his family life and the Palestinian men with whom he has “no connection”, is forming a connection: as his conception of community is rooted in shared history, his hesitant incorporation of the Palestinian labourers into his family history hints at a growing sense of kinship with them, kinship that he rejects on another level. Once again, boundaries and belonging are in constant flux.

Their stories have shown that ambivalence can coexist with strong ethno-national sentiment and commitment to one national narrative, and that alternative stories are most likely to be expressed through metaphor, symbol, and other oblique means. It was also found that young people living in areas of high friction are more likely to be aware of forbidden histories than young people who are at some distance from these fault lines, even though the fault lines’ inhabitants lead largely segregated lives. Again, this suggests that fault lines play a fundamental role in the transmission of forbidden history, and that even in heavily segregated areas, the idea of the border is enough to facilitate transmission; it joins the other metaphors in the storytellers’ figurative lexicon.

Returning to that lexicon, the “unfinished houses” that Nurit and Stav associate with Palestinians, and the locked doors that recur in Junayd’s stories about Israelis, provide an overarching metaphor that enables us to understand the place of forbidden histories in the young people’s lives and their role in how community, belonging, and exclusion are imagined, with house-building analogous to storytelling. Forbidden histories are concealed behind a door. They emerge piece by piece as the house is built. They spill out when door is opened for the first time, perhaps at the turn of a rusting key of the sort that prompted Abed to say, “The return.” Even when the house’s inhabitants and stories remain publicly unacknowledged, their presence – or the possibility of their presence – is felt in young people’s lives and evident in the stories they tell about what, and how, they remember.
Chapter Six – Happily Ever After? Creating Endings

In a traditional sequential literary narrative the expected function of an ending is to provide closure, with the author “walking backwards out of the narrative, vacating textual space at his or her conclusion by reversing the perspective or redirecting the angle of one vision on events.” (Rogers 1992:85) Climax is provided by this shift in perspective, which may take the form of a sudden twist in plot; while closure is achieved through a coherent resolution of the narrative’s discrete and disparate parts (and represented gesturally by the physical closure of the book as the reader arrives at the last page). This understanding of endings and their function cannot be applied easily to oral storytelling, even with tales that end in “and they lived happily ever after” or other classic codes that signal conclusion. Such stories spill beyond their “happily ever after,” altering with each retelling, as evidenced by the many versions of traditional tales that flourish in oral folk culture. Listening to my participants’ stories over a long period of time, especially in a group, I noticed that stories often melted into one another in a similar way, with one person picking up where the previous teller had left off. Young people would return to previously told stories, sometimes months later, to add more detail or to give a different version. This made it difficult to gauge where the ending came, if one came at all. Their stories were elicited by my questions and prompts, which added another layer of complexity: how did my choice of prompts affect the endings the young people gave? Had I asked other questions, would the narrative trajectory have altered or would the same stories have emerged?

Moving from structural to thematic consideration of endings, rupture, discontinuity, and incompleteness are recurring motifs in the young people’s storytelling, further complicating the challenge of locating an end. This sense of incompleteness originates from the young people’s usual inability to physically explore the places that feature in their stories, which becomes clear in Stav and Nurit’s response to the question “What is the word ‘Gaza’ to you?”

Nurit: Oh, I’ve thought of [Gaza] so many times. It’s like really really dark, and –
Stav: Yeah.
Nurit: And seriously, if I imagine what it looks like, I don’t know, because I’ve never, I really haven’t seen it – I don’t even know where the soldiers go to. I imagine it like this scary place, with rockets flying around, and I don’t know – a big empty space, very dark.
Stav: I think a lot of things…I always imagine it with unfinished houses, because I know when we – we have grandparents that live in the shtachim [the West Bank, lit. ‘territories’], and when we drive next to them, next to the kfarim [villages] and stuff
like that, all the houses are unfinished. Like from the outside. So I always imagine it like unfinished houses and sand. Like a deserty place.

Rogers describes endings as a “Parthian dart” that the author or storyteller releases as she “walks backwards from the narrative, vacating the textual space.” (Rogers 1992:85) This understanding of endings, which treats them as carefully controlled and strategic, can only apply to stories in which the teller is familiar with the space, capable of consciously guiding the listener to the reversed perspective or new angle that is identified here as central to an ending. This is true even of fairy tales, which are typically set in an unspecified land “far, far away.” As discussed in Chapter 3, the genre is rich in cultural motifs and symbols that function as landmarks, enabling teller and listener to make sense of and map out these imaginary spaces. By contrast, Stav lacks knowledge of and consequently narrative command over the unknown Palestinian places she depicts: she glimpses the houses from the windows of a car as she travels on a segregated road network, and is familiar with them only “from the outside.” Unfinished houses and empty spaces serve as a potent metaphor for the young people’s storytelling as a whole, whose discontinuities are reminiscent of half-built staircases and whose sense of incompleteness is invoked by a blank concrete wall awaiting its colour.

The image of the unfinished house is equally applicable to my research. I began this chapter on a return visit to Palestine/Israel in December 2015, five months after concluding fieldwork. The visit was spontaneous, with no clear research goal behind it; it was only after I arrived in the country and sat down to write that I realized the decision to return was driven by my own preoccupation with endings. As a storyteller and writer as well as a researcher, I wanted to craft an effective ending, an urge that raised questions as well as precipitating the purchase of a plane ticket to Tel Aviv. What did I mean by an ‘effective’ ending? I had been treating the young people’s stories as bricks and building-blocks, intended to be part of a larger coherent whole. My unspoken restlessness came from the belief that if only I looked in the right places I would find the missing bricks to complete the whole: a house that all my participants might be able to look at and call home. That was the ending as I imagined it. Wandering through East Jerusalem in the soft grey rain, unsure quite where I was headed, I recognized that my house would remain unfinished.

This final chapter moves beyond closure to examine other characteristics that endings might possess and the functions they perform, giving special attention to how participants treat the concept of ending in their stories. Possible endings to violence and oppression were imagined in several stories; others dealt with the ending of a life. Working with older teenagers, I was conscious that they stood in a liminal position between adolescence and
adulthood, and wondered what the end of childhood meant for their storytelling. In bringing together a structural analysis of the stories and the themes and stylistic features common to their endings, a reflection on my own role in shaping these endings, and an examination of how the narrators approach the idea of ending, the chapter provides vital context for the concluding discussion on what this research tells us about young people’s conceptualization of community through storytelling: ‘beginning’ and ‘end’ are not only time markers, but also spatial and geographical demarcation lines, and are therefore particularly significant in any narrative representation of belonging and exclusion.

The sense of an ending: making meaning through narrative structure

Any attempt to separate ending from closure and to question the frequent conflation of the two that occurs through sequential narrative will bring us into contact with feminist literary theory. Participants’ stories sometimes flowed in concentric circles (Rafael’s storytelling, which began with him establishing himself as Jewish through his family’s Holocaust history and rippled out to include Arab identity, with him widening and elaborating on stories that had come before) and were at other times told in hesitant jerky forays, with the narrator pulling back to her locus (Yara’s storytelling, which always led to the checkpoint; and Maayan’s storytelling, which was tied to her parents and their separation). The absence of linear structure in the young people’s narratives evokes feminist responses to the traditional teleological plotline (linearity is encoded even in the term ‘plotline’) that culminate in either marriage or death for women, whose narrative structure reflects and reinforces social structures. In these critiques the work of Virginia Woolf’s fictional novelist Mary Carmichael – “Mary is tampering with the expected sequence. First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence” – represents the emancipatory potential of alternative narrative structures that lack the ‘expected’ ending. (Homans 1994) Given the oppressive nature of the dual-narrative approach and its promotion of a rigid binary among in Palestinian and Israeli youth, already considered in the earlier chapter on narrative violence, this image of breaking sentence and sequence takes on particular relevance. Feminist writing and literary theory provide an illuminating gloss on participants’ stories, encouraging us to view their non-linearity as a liberating quality. They also provide insight into how the young people’s storytelling might be seen to undermine dominant narratives and cultures, military culture especially, or to draw out other meanings and interpretations from these stories.

For many Israeli participants, the army means the end of childhood; and in a clear linear process, conscription signals their initiation into the national collective. 17-year-old
Yuval takes it further, identifying army service as fundamental to being Jewish: “This is not [a question] for the head, it’s for the heart. It’s about what it means for me to be a Jewish man.” As a young Orthodox man from a religious settlement, he connects army service with maleness; 18-year-old Noga, aware that she is one of girls from her own Orthodox settlement community who will enlist, explains her decision with, “I think that today you can be a religious girl in the army.” Emphasizing the difference between army life and her life as it is now, and the importance of this experience to Israeli identity, she states:

I’m going to army…I want to be in the – it’s all the Israelis, and it’s – kind of to be an Israeli…It’s not the reason to go, but – yeah…Why is it to be an Israeli? First, everyone needs to do it. It’s a different experience, I think, it’s not like the regular life from what I’ve seen. It makes you meet people you don’t meet in your life.

Although both Yuval and Noga present army service as the end of one story and the beginning of another, in sequential narrative style, the way in which they approach the army through storytelling brings that linearity into question. This is particularly apparent in Noga’s storytelling, as army service is not socially expected of her; she treats it as something distinct from ‘regular life’, a way of encountering new people as well as asserting her place in society. The familiar linear structure of the conscription story is subverted by her emphasis on the unfamiliar faces that would not appear on her religious settlement kibbutz. Although Yuval treats army service as a fundamental part of Jewishness and maleness – and therefore something intrinsic to him, rather than ‘a different experience’ to be pursued – he prefigures his discussion of the military with his hope to spend a year volunteering in a centre for children with special needs before enlisting. While volunteer work is common among Israeli youth, this type of civil service is typically performed by Orthodox women or people with health problems that preclude enlistment, and is seen as lacking social cachet. Yuval must be aware that childcare is coded as feminine, associated with bodily weakness, and carries little prestige, but instead of allowing his journey to adulthood to end with him armed and in uniform, he presents an alternative route. In putting my next question to him, I was left wondering which road to take, the one ending in the recruitment base or the one leading to the childcare centre. In creating a fork in the narrative road, he breaks the narrative’s linearity and complicates its ending; he has identified himself as a soldier, but has also chosen a role for himself that is seen as feminine. The end of adolescence and his emergence into (male) adulthood is no longer straightforward.

Feminist scholars have argued that linear narrative, with its preoccupation with the fulfilment or thwarting of desire, is fundamentally violent. (De Lauretis 1984; Winnett 1990)
This understanding forms the bedrock of feminist narrative theory. (Homans 1994) It has special import for the young people’s depictions of conscription, as in signalling the end to childhood, conscription is also bound up with developing sexuality. Teenage girls (Israeli and Palestinian) were particularly sensitive to this aspect. Power, frustration, and sex form the undertow in Stav’s description of the army:

I don’t think girls have a lot of influence in the army, like in sherut leumi [civil national service], they don’t make a very big change, and in the army … I don’t think girls have enough options, like ways they could give to the country. So if we’re going to give two years out of our lives it should be to make a change, but – . Girls don’t do kravi [combat], which I wouldn’t have done anyway… There are hardly any girls that do kravi, you know most – like in cheil ha’avir [Air Force] there are like two girls that are pilots. It’s like men controlling the whole thing, there is really no place for women. Like maybe the coffee we could make in many different places. [Laughs] In intelligence, there are girls doing cyber stuff, but it’s like the only thing where you could really make a change I think, and really give to your country.

It was only after listening to conversations about female army service in other Orthodox homes that I realized domestic images such as coffee-making can function as a metaphor for aspects of military service that are viewed as disturbing or immoral, including mixed company and casual sex. Stav’s rejection of that constraining domestic role could be read as a rejection of the army’s social norms, although she does not raise them explicitly. Rather than constructing a linear narrative about military service, involving her aspirations and expectations, she begins and ends with female lack of influence. The lack of sequential progression towards a resolution (an interest in being chosen for a prestigious unit, for example) reinforces her statement that “there is no place for women.” She refers to female soldiers as both ‘girls’ and ‘women’, indicating that they are on the cusp between adolescence and adulthood, a place she will soon occupy herself. Arriving at this point has prompted her to think about what it means to be a woman both in the army itself and in a heavily militarized culture; and the symbol she chooses is the coffee cup, overtly domestic and covertly sexual.

This sexual dynamic emerged more clearly in one of Yara’s checkpoint stories:

And once there is a funny thing that happened. We didn’t really speak to them [soldiers], but my friend’s sister, she – we went through the checkpoint and there were, it was four o’clock, and at four o’clock all the people from Palestine who work in Israel come back from their jobs. So it was full. Like, they were all men and you couldn’t even pass, it was very hard, and they’re all like huge, so you can’t pass and it will take a long time. So the sister of my friend went to the soldier, she’s pretty, so she went like this to show him. [Flutters eyelashes, exaggerated preening.] Like he
could open the door for us from the other way so we could pass, without having – so
the soldier started looking at us and smiling. [Laughs] And then he told her, “Come,”
and she came to him and he told her, “I know what you want from me, but I’m sorry,
we can’t let you pass from here, it’s against the law.” So she was sad and then she
came back. [Laughs] So we couldn’t – we waited for the queue to finish.

This story has a circular rather than linear structure: the girls “came back”, a recurring phrase
in Yara’s checkpoint stories, and the anecdote ends with them waiting to pass rather than the
crossing itself. This ending emphasizes the movement restrictions that govern their lives and
the disparity in power between occupier and occupied, signalling to the listener that this is the
main import of the story – its themes are humiliation and powerlessness. However, the
anecdote fleetingly introduces a different dynamic between the soldier and the Palestinian
girls: Yara’s friend attempts flirting as a strategy in the knowledge that the soldiers are, like
her, in their late teens or early twenties. Her awareness of sex and the currency that her
appearance might carry emerges alongside her recognition of the soldiers as age-related
peers. For Yara, another friend’s seventeenth birthday jolted her into this same recognition:

When I used to go to the mall with my friend – my friend is from Beit Sahour, she’s
from here, but she lives in Beit Safafa [a Jerusalem neighbourhood]. Sometimes the
people in Beit Safafa – there are people in Beit Safafa that are crazy and they want to
join the army. You don’t know why. So she told me, “What do you think about me
joining the army?” She would never do that, but she was like – because she knows
that I will start to call her [names], say things – so she wanted to tell me what do you
think. So I told her, “Never do that or I won’t talk to you again.” This was the time
when we realized that these people [soldiers] are our age, she could go now to the
army. Usually I don’t think about it.

The military functions as a concrete marker of childhood’s end for both Israeli and
Palestinian youth. Social workers supporting Palestinian teenage boys who have been in army
custody told me that the boys frequently view arrest and imprisonment as an initiation to
adult life, and they have difficulty identifying themselves as children again after their release,
due to the prison experiences that set them apart from their peers and even their older
relatives. As with conscription for their Israeli counterparts, military imprisonment becomes a
rite of passage, “a ceremony of leave-taking” for childhood. (Rogers 1992: 85) Consequently
each appearance of the army in a young person’s story indicates an end of some sort: an
abrupt termination to a young Palestinian’s journey, as at roadblocks and checkpoints; the
limits of a storyteller’s known landscape, as with Nurit’s attempt to imagine Gaza (“I really
haven’t seen it – I don’t even know where the soldiers go to”); and finally the ending of a life.
19-year-old Du’a, a young Palestinian woman from Bethlehem, commented, “I used to try
and talk to them [soldiers] when I was really little, but now I couldn’t. When I look at one
now, I think was he in Gaza, what did he do in Gaza. Always Gaza.” The result is that the
young people’s narratives are fissured with potential endings, even though they may lack the
climax and closure that accompany a conventionally structured narrative. Through these
fissures, the ‘sense of an ending’ pervades each story, with emancipatory effect: the onus is
no longer on the storyteller to satisfy the audience by creating a narrative closure that she
does not experience through daily life with intractable political violence, but on the listener to
register all the disparate and sometimes disjointed stories that make up that young person’s
experience. Storytelling’s liberating potential is achieved partly through privileging youth’s
lived experience over established narrative conventions and adult expectations (essentially
the same thing) and partly through introducing a myriad of endings rather than narrowly
emphasizing only one.

Through her storytelling, 15-year-old Budour demonstrates how she consciously
disrupts the linear narratives of war and national struggle that she encounters at school and in
Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom. The Israeli calendar is punctuated with days of mourning
and celebration, which form a powerful story of suffering (Yom ha’Shoah), struggle (Yom
ha’Zikaron), and rebirth (Yom ha’Atzmaut) that is re-enacted each year. Budour disrupts this
narrative by refusing to participate in commemorative events for dead soldiers:

There was a boy who was in the Air Force and he was killed. He died because there
was a problem in the plane. On the day when they remember the people who were
killed in wars [Yom ha’Zikaron], only the Jewish people go to his grave, so this is the
part where we’re really separated. So it’s very hard for us to go there, thinking, “You
were in the war of Lebanon. [2006] You were killed, but you were there because you
had weapons on that plane, and you were going there to harm people.” I mean, I can’t
ignore this fact. I’m sad that his family lost him, and that we lost someone from the
village, but I can’t ignore the fact that if he went there then other people would lose
their relatives. So I can’t go there and show 100% support for his family. It’s very
hard for me. And this is one of the things when we said do you think the Nakba
affected you – I can’t stand there showing my sorrow to someone who was going to
do something that for me is a crime. And I said it in front of Meir once [15-year-old
Jewish participant] and he said that he doesn’t agree with me. I remember that we had
that discussion. And I sort of feel guilty that day, when I don’t go to show my support
to the family, but I really can’t, because I can’t ignore the fact that he died when he
was going to do that thing.

By absenting herself from the graveside of the dead pilot and refusing to assume any role in
the national narrative that will culminate in fireworks on Independence Day, Budour does not
attempt to forget or minimize his death. Her use of the first-person plural demonstrates that
she perceives him as part of her community and experiences a sense of loss: “[W]e lost
someone from the village…” In moving away from the graveside – Rogers’s image of the storyteller “walked out backwards” from the narrative recurs again – she makes room for the dead of Lebanon and invites the listener, in this case Meir, to consider their stories. The ending of one life becomes a narrative gateway into the lives and deaths of unknown neighbours on the other side of the border.

Budour’s reference to the Nakba highlights the cyclical quality that is present in many of the young people’s storytelling. Nakba memory recurs with each war and act of political violence, forming a touchstone for grief. This pattern has been demonstrated in other studies of narrative in Israel/Palestine. When the anthropologist Fatma Kassem interviewed elderly Palestinian citizens of Israel about their experiences of internal displacement in the Nakba, “phrases such as ‘days repeat themselves’, ‘Look, we do not need to tell our stories, only say what is happening to the Palestinians’, ‘the poor people of Gaza’…were frequently uttered.” (Kassem 2011:58) The present invokes the past, making it impossible to arrive at an ending in linear fashion; Budour’s stories of 2006 bring her back to 1948. Yet despite this cyclical structure, she is one of few storytellers who see exiting the traumatic past and violent present as a possibility. Having examined how ‘the sense of an ending’ can be introduced to a story even if it lacks a clearly delineated, we will discuss how the young people envisage an end to political violence through their storytelling.

“To make the dream come true”: ending political violence

The beginning of my fieldwork was marked by the abduction and murder of three Israeli teenage boys by Palestinian gunmen in the West Bank, the torture and revenge killing of a fifteen-year-old Palestinian boy by a group of Israeli settlers, and a military assault on Gaza. The research drew to its close as a rash of politically motivated stabbings broke out in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and people on the street began to speak of a third intifada. I heard some Palestinians referring to it as “the intifada of the knives”, and others as “an intifada of the young”, in recognition of the fact that so many of the attacks were being carried out by teenagers and young men. This was the backdrop against which the storytellers presented possible endings for the conflict. In the final storytelling session I undertook, 17-year-old Yuval explained that he sees no ending:

Part of the sadness of this situation is that it’s – in some kind of way it’s unsolvable. A lot of people can say, “Ah, two countries for two peoples,” or, “When I will be in the Israeli government, I will solve all the problems and everything will be gone,” and also people in the world [adopting pompous tone]: “Ah, what are they doing? They
don’t know how to do it! Let me do it! I will do it better.” People know how to say what’s wrong. We also see what’s wrong. I live here and my life is good, I admit it, my life is really good. And I see what’s wrong. We have a lot of things to — to protect, but to improve. After all the dreams and nice words, you have to also do something in the end…There is a chance. I hope that it will happen, but I guess it won’t happen, that we will learn to love each other. It can’t happen…People die in the end. There’s only one thing that can happen: that the conflict will be. Just be.

Several tensions and disconnects emerge through Yuval’s words. There is the disparity between his quality of life and that of Palestinians living in close proximity to him, which he raised independently of my questioning; the tension between Israeli self-defence and the Palestinian need for civil rights (only hesitantly articulated); between Jewish presence and Arab presence; between international perceptions of the conflict and his own lived experience; between “dreams and nice words” and the imperative to take action; and ultimately between the hope that “we will learn to love each other” and the bleak conviction that “people die in the end.” Reconciliation is acknowledged as a possibility – “There is a chance” – while enduring violence is presented as inevitable fact, the “only thing that can happen.” Yuval treats the conflict as a state of being that is distinguished by death and the fear of death, and one of the few autobiographical stories he shared revealed the pervasiveness of that fear:

I’m not so afraid. Sometimes, to be – [pause] I mean, to be killed. Two weeks ago a man from Alon Shvut died. [Yuval’s community, a small religious settlement] Someone shot him at the gate of Alon Shvut. And every one of us, everyone loved him – really loved him. I’m friends with his daughter, and his son is a good friend of me, and to be killed – it’s a terrifying thing, that someone I love, that something will happen to someone that I love, and unfortunately, it’s not – it makes sense in our environment, that something like this will happen. Every time there is an attack or something like this, on WhatsApp, everyone will say, “I’m alive, send a sign of life,” and everyone will say, “I’m alive, I’m alive, I’m alive…” That something will happen to someone – it’s even more frightening than something will happen to you.

Although he begins by declaring himself to be “not so afraid”, Yuval states that the fear of a loved one dying is ever-present (“It makes sense in our environment”), and describes this as “terrifying.” This suggests that his initial disclamation of fear does not mean that it is absent but that its omnipresence has transformed it into a normal state. His story also provides a snapshot of how fear shapes social interaction in his community, with teenagers using social media as a means of checking one another’s safety.

As Yuval told few personal stories, preferring to discuss his political views or to speak about life in Israel in general terms, the autobiographical anecdotes he does share
possess a particular forcefulness. “I’m alive, I’m alive, I’m alive,” is how he ends this final story, the repetition not only emphasizing the fear shared by him and his friends, but echoing the first personal story he shared: his return from a school visit to Poland and his first glimpse of his parents. “We came back to Jerusalem and I saw my parents standing there…I saw them and I remember feeling happiness. I came back from a place where you can’t imagine what happened there and you see your family and you understand how wonderful your life is.” Consequently Yuval’s storytelling, like that of so many other participants, moves in circles: the ending returns the listener to the beginning. The whole narrative revolves round opposites, with Holocaust deaths and Yuval’s ongoing fear of bereavement forming one magnetic pole, while a triumphant joy in living (“You understand how wonderful your life is”) forms the other. Political violence and death are integral to Yuval’s world, making it difficult for him to go beyond the hesitant, “There is a chance” in describing reconciliation. This becomes clearer with the second ending he imagines:

There is a chance, also, that we will leave the country. It can happen. In the history of the Jewish nation, it happened. Two thousand years ago, the Jewish people lived in Israel. It can happen. We try that it won’t happen…but we admit that it can happen, and I don’t know, maybe there is a way that they [Palestinians] will leave, but I don’t see it. They live here, I mean.

It is apparently easier for Yuval to imagine one community leaving en masse than it is for him to narrate an ending in which both remain, showing the extent to which segregation and past violence have affected his conceptualization of community. However, this ending also contains an affirmation of life – in this case, Palestinian life – and that itself may be read as acknowledgement of the possibility of shared living.

Dying is also a prominent theme in the diaries produced by Bethlehem teenagers during the Second Intifada, as killings were more frequent at that time and almost all the teenagers suffered a personal loss (one participant in the creative writing project, Christine Murra, was killed by an Israeli sniper; and several writers were bereaved of other friends or family members). Interestingly, one teenager opens her hesitant first entry with deaths, in a poignant example of how endings and beginnings are intertwined in narratives of intractable political violence:

Now I’m writing…who knows? Maybe after a while I won’t be able to…so I want to write to say all that I want to say.

Look, I think about death every moment, but I like my life and want to live longer – well, not for a very long time where I can’t stand up on my own two feet.
Almost everybody that I loved died, but if I think deeply about it, I will find out that we are all visitors on this earth. (Atallah and van Teeffelen 2004:22)

This is the entry in full. It is not clear whether 15-year-old Rouba is imagining her own death when she mentions a future inability to write, or simply noting that self-expression is difficult. This vagueness is also present in her description of personal bereavements; she offers no names or details, and within the same sentence “everybody that I loved” has become “visitors on this earth”, in a stark transition from the intimate to the blankly impersonal. This image of life as a fleeting visit forms the backdrop for all the subsequent stories that Rouba shares, commencing with a military incursion: “I was scared at the beginning of the Israeli invasion (the one that lasted 40 days) because it was my first time to see tanks and military vehicles in Bethlehem.” That beginning is pregnant with the deaths that Rouba alludes to in hesitant language.

Another teenager employs a spatial metaphor to convey the occupation’s intractable nature, mirroring Yuval’s image of the conflict as a state of being: “Days have passed and life is just going on; we are still under the same circumstances. We are like a giant man stuck in a small place; he can’t run away and he can’t stay.” (Atallah and van Teeffelen 2004:25) This sense of being trapped in an impossible situation is present in many of the diaries, and it also surfaces in the storytelling sessions I conducted ten years later. When invited to envisage an ending to the conflict, Noga responded, “I don’t know if I can do anything about the conflict. Even though it interests me, I don’t know why, or what I can do.” 15-year-old Rania, an Arab student at Yad b’Yad, expressed jaded irritation at such questions:

There’s a lot of people that come to see the school, and they choose me a lot [for interviews]…Like some of the interviews at school, they’re like really boring, like ‘What is peace?’ [tongue-clicking, sighing] or questions about the school, like ‘Since when are you in the school?’ and ‘What do you do in the school?’ and kind of, I’m used to these questions so they’re boring…I don’t have anything that I want to get from these interviews, so I don’t have a problem with any sorts of questions, so there’s nothing that I want people to ask. It’s just like I want them, like, they want to hear and be respectful and everything. Sometimes they bring us people who disagree with the idea of the school…so it’s just, I don’t feel like I want to answer their questions.

Rania’s exasperation at being asked to define peace made me reconsider the images of innocence and guileless wisdom that are attached to childhood, which may lead adults to approach young people in the belief that they possess privileged quasi-spiritual insights into conflict and its resolution. In stating that she herself does not have “anything I want to get” from these interviews, Rania implies that she is aware her adult interlocutors may have
something they want to get, and she was firm in registering lack of interest. Stav voiced
similar criticism of adult faith in young people’s innate capacity for peacemaking: “I don’t
think giving these decisions to kids will suddenly make it all better.” This prompted me to
stop asking direct questions about how young people envisage an end to political violence,
acknowledging that some of them might see the question as fetishizing their youth rather than
as representing a genuine interest in their political thinking and imaginative lives. Instead I
looked for clues in stories they told in response to other prompts and questions. Yara, for
example, returned to the separation barrier and its checkpoints when narrating an end to
violence:

First of all, the wall. I think we should mix with them [Israelis] and start to know
more about them, and they know more about us, and for them, like – start to come
here, we go there, know more about our cultures, and no more checkpoints, no more
army, no more, err – yeah, this is like the wall and the checkpoints, these are the main
things, and especially Netanyahu, he should [pause] leave. [Laughs] I heard on the
radio his speech, because he won another time, he said, “We will continue building
settlements, we will continue destroying houses, we will continue taking land.” So
this is like – I don’t know.

Yara juxtaposes the image of a relentless occupation (“We will continue building settlements,
we will continue destroying houses”) with the destruction of occupation’s infrastructure (“No
more checkpoints, no more army”), offsetting her potential ending against the Israeli
government’s stance. The repetitive phrasing suggests a stalemate. Earlier on she expressed
doubt that peace would ever come, saying, “We live in totally different cultures and I think
there is no time when we will live peacefully with each other, even – because we don’t think
the same and it’s hard.” She was also the only participant to acknowledge feeling hatred
towards members of the other community. “I still hate them. Yes.” Despite this, she imagines
the conflict ending through seeking “to know more about them” as well as through
destruction of occupation. In creating an ending, she is capable of transcending the dominant
emotion she feels at present, while still acknowledging it.

Stav also explores the possibilities of interpersonal contact:

I think that kids should be open to other kids, without their race or religion or beliefs,
because when we grow up we’ll choose our friends probably by where we work, so it
doesn’t have to go by if they’re religious or not religious, or if they’re Jews or not
Jews. And I think it’s wrong to separate kids so much, and I think we’re closed off to
a lot of people who we could have been friends with and known and learned from.
We’re closed off. I think from gan we should have been together, from
kindergarten… I think it [conflict] is because we don’t learn together and we don’t
know them and – like I really don’t know anyone who’s Arab.
Stav uses spatial metaphors of opening and closure that implicitly reference checkpoints and military curfew, as in Hebrew similar vocabulary is used to describe these. In her narrative it is not just Palestinians who are under seger [closure]; she sees herself as “closed off.” This is reminiscent of a remark by Waard, a 10-year-old Palestinian girl living in close proximity to Israeli settlers in Hebron’s heavily guarded Old City: “They [settlers] have put themselves in a cage.” Both girls recognize that in limiting Palestinian freedom of movement, occupation has circumscribed how Israelis live their own lives. In envisaging an alternative, Stav does not use the future tense, but a wistful past conditional: “We could have been friends…” This suggests that she imagines a life without violence as a possibility that existed once, but that is now beyond reach.

Budour arrived at this topic through a story about an activity at her Jewish high school:

There was a time when we sat in the class. I think they told us to build – to find a solution, to build our own country. So we [students from Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom] said that we want the country to live how Neve Shalom lives. Then there was an argument that was so stupid. The things they said – “What do you mean, we can’t live all the country like Neve Shalom lives, it’s not realistic, you don’t even have a flag.” That was the main problem, the flag. [Laughs] And I said, “Actually, we have a symbol for the village,” and they said, “OK, but it’s not official, so it doesn’t count.” Then the teacher even said, “What if I want the Magen David [Star of David] to be my symbol on the flag?” I said, “Why can’t we make a new flag?” And I mean there were so many stupid questions.

Budour’s story raises fascinating questions about language and symbolism, positing that the ability to imagine alternatives to enduring political violence is enhanced if young people have access to a richer figurative lexicon than that afforded by state symbols. “Why can’t we make a new flag?” is a controversial question in a largely segregated education system, whereas in a bilingual integrated village it becomes a logical suggestion. Following this anecdote, Budour demonstrates that envisaging an end to conflict was more than an imaginative exercise for her; she finds that her presence in the school has changed attitudes among her peers.

My [Jewish] friend who I used to fight with in Amud Anan [Operation Pillar of Defense 2012], he told me a few weeks ago, “I think you got a much better education than I got.” They even did a story about us, in Channel 2, about us being friends and the fights we used to have and what does it mean about the country’s future, about the solution, which was very interesting. So he told me that he thinks we got a better education. So I think the way that they [Jewish classmates] look at the village is a
positive way, but they still have some doubts. They don’t think it’s very realistic that everyone would live in this way, but they do consider this place as a positive and a good place. They always want to visit and to see it, and they ask me a lot of questions about how it goes.

Paradoxically Budour’s Jewish classmates view the village as both a utopia in microcosm, an improbable fairy tale ending, and as a present-day reality that can be visited and questioned. It is a physical embodiment of one alternative future, which Jewish teenagers have come to think about through contact with Budour, its narrator.

Like Budour, 15-year-old Rafael identifies creating a strong integrated community as crucial in challenging segregation and thereby ending violence:

One thing which is special about our school [Yad b’Yad] is that it’s not only a school, it’s also an entire community around it, so a community of parents and brothers and even cousins who don’t necessarily go to the school, who don’t have a child who goes to the school, but who are still part of the school community. So we started integrating the kids from the school into the community and doing a lot of community days and more trips and things like that so the class would be more connected, then the time of sixth grade came, people would say, “Well, I’m really connected to the school now, so I’ll probably stay.” Also having a lot of talks with the children and telling them the importance of staying in the school, and the fact that if you do want to make even the slightest difference, you need to continue with that.

In Rafael’s view an end to violence is being co-written by every young person who opts to attend Yad b’Yad instead of moving to a segregated school for secondary education. He does not envisage any ending to the conflict other than full integration achieved through young people’s active participation in the education system. Rania lacks his conviction that her participation is automatically transformative on a wider level, but comments, “I don’t see any difference, I don’t feel that it changes anything, but I still do [it], because maybe it will.” She is motivated by the mere possibility of a different life, even if it remains unseen.

For Amal, an end to political violence is imagined as a homecoming: “I can’t go back to the whole family I used to have before the divorce… Maybe that’s why I identify a lot with refugees… I’m waiting to find home, just like the Palestinians are waiting to find home.” She does not describe what such a home would be like, saying only what it is not: “[It] is not about having a house and living on the land…[Y]ou can’t just grab it.” This illusory and intangible idea of home contrasts with the assertive declaration that follows: “But I’m just like the Palestinian cause. I will be the one who’s going to find a solution for myself, because as Palestinians, we’re not going to wait for the United States or the Arabs or Israel to find us a solution. We’re going to find our solution ourselves.” She does not describe the solution,
but makes it clear that it will be brought about through solidarity and community – “ourselves.”

Budour, Rafael, and Rania are able to draw on their present experiences of shared living when imagining an end to conflict, which have furnished them with practical examples of what the future might look like. In the absence of such experiences, other participants use allegory and fable to narrate an ending, as with this short tale written by four sixteen-year-olds from Bethlehem:

There was a little boy who was holding his toy, a pigeon. While he was playing, he had a dream. He dreamed about another world where he could talk about his toys and his hobbies, his interests and his dreams, instead of just talking about guns, blood, and killing. A world where he could run and play with his friends. In that world was no war, no tanks, no rockets, and no shelling and bombing. A world full of peace. A bullet, an evil bullet, came like a thief and entered his heart. It took his soul and his dream away. His pigeon was beside him, right there next to his motionless body. But the pigeon remembered the boy’s dream, and came to life and flew away. It decided to tell his dream to the world. And it decided to make the dream come true.

As seen in Chapter 3, birds in flight are present in many of the young Palestinians’ stories, especially those told in Hebron’s Old City and Aida camp. In a Bethlehem version of Red Riding Hood, Warda was able to escape the wall with the aid of a bird that she drew on its concrete, which also “came to life and flew away.” However, the stories do not end with a simple escape; Warda remains in Bethlehem, crossing the wall daily to help her grandmother, and the pigeon decides “to make the dream come true.” Reading this story, which was written in English, I assumed that the writers had been trying to add a symbolic dove to the story but had mistranslated it as pigeon. When I queried it, the writers replied that they wanted to keep their pigeon. The choice of an ordinary bird that is typically classed as vermin and has no symbolic weight suggests that for these storytellers, an end to violence may lie with people who are overlooked, and that answers can be found in everyday life. The ending as they imagine it combines the fabulous with the mundane. Notably, the writers do not describe how or even whether the dream is actually realized – they end with the pigeon deciding “to tell the world”, with storytelling. As with many other participants, they either cannot imagine the specifics of an end to conflict, or do not see such an activity as important. It is the act of telling the story that matters.

When I asked Yuval how the region might look with the arrival of peace, he smiled and said, “That’s hard. I don’t know.” “Imagine.” There was a long pause, filled with birdsong and the sound of occasional traffic. Eventually: “I can’t.” 10-year-old Waard in
Hebron explained, “Even if they change and decide to be nice with us, we will never live in peace with them because we will never forget everything they did to us, never.” She cannot imagine a future without referring to the violence that has been part of her life since birth. (Her family has suffered multiple attacks from settlers, with soldiers’ complicity; Waard herself has received hospital treatment.) Interestingly, given the stress placed on memory in peace and conflict studies, a teenager from Bethlehem identifies forgetting as crucial to future coexistence: “I can assure you that right now I don’t like the Israeli people but maybe in time I will forget what they did to us and respect them.” (Atallah and van Teeffelen 2004:117) A shared future is conditional on erasure of memory, meaning that the young people’s difficulty in imagining the future may be intensified by the potency of the past as it manifests in the present. Waard, who has bars on her bedroom windows to protect her from settler attacks, can only view her future through those bars; while teenagers who have grown up in bilingual communities striving for full integration are able to ask questions such as, “Why can’t we make a new flag?” All the imagined endings to conflict were rooted in the children’s present-day lives, revealing yet another circle in narrative: the future returns us to the present.

**Ending the research: central themes and patterns**

There is a vast body of research on narrative and memory in Palestine/Israel. To my knowledge, this is the first in-depth qualitative study to focus exclusively on young people and their lived experience, and to concentrate on their storytelling as a socio-political and literary act rather than as a means of therapy. It has also involved youth from diverse and highly polarized subcommunities, and while its idiographic nature prevents us from drawing statistical generalizations from the data, the themes that emerge from the young people’s storytelling remind us why such quantitative analysis on narratives, social attitudes, and beliefs in conflict zones can be at best partially accurate and must be cautiously applied. For example, in her seminal work on the Holocaust and Nakba as twin “ghosts of catastrophe” that haunt Israel/Palestine, Jo Roberts notes that according to survey data Holocaust denial among Palestinian citizens of Israel dips and rises according to ongoing political events, and stresses that “the collective understanding of a historical event is mutable, shaped by reaction to a present threat of exclusion.” (Roberts 2013:158) My own study significantly increases our insight into the mutability of collective memory, especially taboo memory, by casting light on the storytelling process through which memory and the resultant ideas of belonging are mediated and developed among youth.
The young people’s stories are shot through with ambivalence, which is vital to this process. This was the overarching theme that emerged as I listened to the storytelling groups and worked through individual transcripts, forming the superordinate interpretative framework for the other themes. (These are listed in the table in Appendix 1, which anchors each theme in quotations from the young people and draws out the subthemes.) As discussed in Chapter 4, with reference to Levinas, storytelling creates a space in which such ambivalence can be freely expressed, as it is integral to the face-to-face relation. Therefore Yara is able to declare hatred for Israelis while thinking that “we should mix with them and start to know more about them”; Noga denies the existence of the Nakba, but recognizes that Palestinians have suffered because of it; Mahmoud fantasizes about killing soldiers while hoping that his Israeli friends will return to him and play football after their army service; Rafael can explore what it means to be both Jewish and Arab; and Yuval expresses hope that “we will learn to love each other” despite his belief that the conflict is everlasting and “people die in the end.” Quantitative and some qualitative methodologies struggle to capture this fluidity and ambiguity in thought, with the result that survey and poll data is often crude and two-dimensional. As the study progressed, a 17-year-old boy from a religious settlement who had not participated himself asked me jokingly, “So what have you found out about us?” I identified ambivalence as a primary finding, explaining how young people appeared to move between multiple apparently conflicting beliefs depending on situation. After a short silence, he replied, “I do that.” He then asked if he could take part “next time.”

Young people responded positively to sensitive questioning that probed these ambiguities, suggesting that the presence of ambivalence indicates topics of particular importance to them. Taking an exploratory interpretative approach was vital: if I pointed out an apparent inconsistency directly, there was a risk that the storyteller would see me as attempting to catch them out in a contradiction rather than trying to gain a multifaceted understanding of their lives. I also had to be mindful of what their experience of researchers had been: like Rania, several young people had been interviewed regularly and had come to feel jaded by adults and their expectations. Israel/Palestine is an over-researched area, especially Palestinian refugee camps, with inhabitants complaining that researchers “do the same interviews with the same people all the time.” This has led to suspicion that many stock questions, particularly those on the refugees’ right of return, are politically motivated and intended to bolster a particular agenda. (Sukarieh and Tannock 2012:501-502) Moving into the more shadowy territory represented by ambiguity and ambivalence naturally means moving away from stock questions. Recognizing ambivalence as a vital part of how young
people imagine community and respond to their histories may enable research to become more fruitful for participants as a result.

This project joins a body of anthropological research in issuing a challenge to humanitarian approaches grounded in the nebulously named ‘area studies’, which have a tendency to cantonize lived experience by region. For example, until recently the experiences of Palestinian refugee youth were treated as exceptional by humanitarian practitioners, and therefore of little import for young people living in other situations of protracted forced migration. In an effort to map points of intersection, this led to a large-scale comparative study of Afghan and Sahrawi youth, which revealed that “multiplicity of identity and some contestation over social memory did exist among these youth. This suggested to us that there may, in fact, be a commonality, a multivocality and a heteroglossia among refugee youth…” (Chatty 2010:29) Terms such as multivocality and heteroglossia (here identified as ambivalence), with their emphasis on word and voice, draw attention to storytelling’s possibilities as a method in situations of conflict violence. These possibilities are already being developed through an ongoing innovative participatory research project that explores the idea of citizenship among youth living in post-conflict urban societies, YouCitizen (2014 – present), which relies on digital “story mapping” to gain a comparative understanding of how young people make and remake citizenship in these spaces. Academic interest in the socio-political aspects of creative and media arts among youth in conflict-affected societies is growing, and my own research joins YouCitizen in mapping out this emerging trajectory.

Storytelling has potential to enrich such comparative work due to the phenomenological underpinnings that have been examined here. The impetus to “go back to the things themselves” ensures that researchers simultaneously remain attuned to the specifics of each situation and therefore avoid perpetuating the iconography of the ‘universal child’, while also recognizing commonalities. Phenomenological methods that rely on autobiographical telling are interested in the insight that subsequent data might give into earlier data; and this intercommunicative process is reflected in oral storytelling, most obviously in folktales, which borrow from, echo, and cannibalize one another. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, storytelling demands a vulnerability and an awareness of the other that compel listeners to question their own ideas and assumptions, making them better able to appreciate the many ambivalent and shifting stories that contribute to young people’s experience of community and interpretation of memory.

Unsurprisingly, given its focus on the subversion and crossing of boundaries, this work also highlights the benefits that an interdisciplinary perspective can bring to work with
youth affected by political violence. It is extremely rare for their stories to be studied as stories, with close attention to literary, linguistic, and stylistic aspects; scholars and practitioners are more concerned with story as evidence or testimony. (Collins 2004:12) The literary and applied linguistic analysis that forms the bedrock of this study, with its emphasis on metaphor and the influence of fairy tale forms, has demonstrated eloquently that studying story as story can furnish answers to questions that might otherwise be treated as the preserve of social sciences. The literary aspect of this study dovetails with recent work in memory studies, which has turned to literature and cinema to examine the transmission of taboo pasts in contested spaces. (Rothberg 2009) Conducting a literary analysis of participants’ stories with reference to the multidirectional and palimpsestic theories of memory has invited us to consider these stories as part of the wider cultural and artistic landscape, further challenging the tenacious associations that have been drawn between story, testimony, and therapy while highlighting the strength of the relationship between language, memory, and space.

Another major finding was the fluidity with which young people narrated space. ‘Israel’, ‘Palestine’, ‘here’, and ‘there’ were used in elastic ways. Yuval, describing how he had witnessed soldiers processing Palestinian workers at checkpoints, expressed disquiet: “I know the soldiers would put them back in Palestine…[T]hey [Palestinians] need to come here so they can have a better life.” We were sitting in a West Bank settlement that Yuval classes as Israel, so what constitutes ‘here’ and ‘back in Palestine’ for him? It seems that these terms change in meaning, sometimes functioning as toponyms and sometimes as ethno-national descriptors of community that cannot easily be mapped onto physical space. The same phenomenon is seen in Yara’s storytelling, when she talks about Palestinian labourers “coming back from Israel” but affirms Jaffa and Haifa as part of Palestine; and in stories of youth from Hebron. 12-year-old Tahani, on being asked where soldiers come from, replied, “Israel.” “Where is that?” “It’s far.” Her response suggests either an uncertainty about Israel’s actual geographical location or a sense of being far removed from it psychologically. Stav and Nurit described visiting grandparents who live in a West Bank settlement, recalling their childhood confusion at not finding an actual Green Line painted on the ground and being unable to tell where “the Territories” began. Basic geopolitical and spatial terms cannot be taken for granted in young people’s narratives of community; their meanings are nebulous. This is particularly noticeable in stories narrated in, and about, the fault lines of the project’s title.

Moving onto the stories’ specific content rather than their broader defining characteristics, historical trauma emerges as central to young people’s self-concept and sense
of community. Noga, on being asked to list the most significant things in her life, gave the Holocaust. The Holocaust was central to the first story Yuval told and it formed the backdrop for all subsequent stories. Holocaust and Nakba were woven together throughout Rafael’s storytelling. Budour, lingering behind after a group storytelling workshop, told me, “The Nakba – we carry it,” and on another meeting commented, “When you see your grandfather crying like that, it’s not something you forget.” She also revealed that the Nakba colours her thinking on current events, linking her family experiences to the carpet-bombing of south Lebanon in 2006. Interestingly the young people in Aida camp rarely mentioned the Nakba by name, although when they introduced themselves at the beginning of the research they gave the name of their families’ original villages. When I asked about this, after nine months in the camp, 12-year-old Amr told me, “We know we’re in the camp and you already know it’s a camp, so there is nothing to say about that.” Another boy, seeing an iconic Nakba-era photograph of a Palestinian refugee woman hiding her face in her scarf being mounted on the separation barrier, interpreted her gesture according to his experience of daily life in the camp. “Tear gas, so she is covering her nose.” The boys indicated that the Nakba constitutes their present reality; as its presence is taken for granted, they rarely feel the need to point to it. By telling me their family villages from 1948 and identifying these as their homes, they indicated that the community they experience in the camp and as a peer group was forged by the Nakba, as without it they would not be growing up together.

Young people’s knowledge of and readiness to talk about forbidden histories was variable. Stav and Nurit, for example, had not heard the term ‘Nakba’ and thought it referred to a Muslim holiday, while Yuval and Noga had considered it in depth. I found that knowledge of the Holocaust was greater among refugees than among Palestinian peers from outside the camps, and that youth from settlements tended to be more aware of the Nakba. In the final stages of the research I invited older participants to consider the reasons for this. Yuval replied simply, “We are close to them in here [in the settlement].” When I pointed out that earlier he had told me that he never interacts with Palestinians, he said, “We are still close. When you live near somebody, you feel it.” He could not pinpoint the moment when he had first become aware of the Nakba. Amal, a refugee in Dheisheh camp, felt that greater Holocaust knowledge was partly due to the fact that refugee camps are highly politicized spaces where great emphasis is placed on the importance of education, and partly because the refugees’ own experiences of displacement and violence have made them more attuned to other experiences of suffering, including the persecution of Jews in Europe. While responses may be far from empathetic, encompassing denial or minimization of the genocide, the
Holocaust still occupies an important if unsettling place in the social and political history of Palestinian refugee communities. Rafael, Yara, and Budour identify this experience of collective trauma as a means to promote reconciliation, arguing that people can use their own histories to develop empathy for the suffering of others. In Rafael’s words: “Maybe that’s a platform where Palestinians and Israelis can...share stories or even get closer, because you know we both had families and then someone banished us and we couldn’t go back.” Forbidden histories are presented as the fulcrum from which a new community might emerge, as there is no way back to the old.

The young people had developed figurative lexicons that they drew on throughout their storytelling, which offered a way for them to approach forbidden histories and navigate hidden landscapes. Stones, keys, birds, walls, doorways, and unfinished houses were symbols that recurred across multiple subcommunities, and we saw that youth were more likely to explore alternative conceptions of community through these symbols than to tell straightforward auto/biographical stories, a system that Ruth Wajnryb refers to as “iconic messaging” in her work on intergenerational transmission of Holocaust memory. (Wajnryb 2009:248) Young people were also more likely to resort to metaphor in order to express empathy. Further applied linguistic and literary research into the origin and development of such lexicons, featuring an analysis of art, music, and other cultural output, might provide insight into the nature of the relationship between metaphor and empathy. Such research carries practical implications for peace and reconciliation work in situations of intergenerational political violence.

The ambivalence that typifies the stories and their tellers’ elastic use of terms such as ‘Israel’ and ‘Palestine’ demonstrates the need to move beyond the constrictive dual-narrative approach that dominates peace work at present. The transmission of forbidden histories across inter- and intra-community boundaries also reveals that mainstream national narratives, while significant in their own right, cannot fully express young people’s engagement with history. This supports Eyal Naveh’s contention that the “historic narrative can no longer be taught as one story and one memory but only as a mosaic of intercommunicating stories and memories.” (Naveh 2006:268) However, this understanding of memory and community raises important ethical and political questions about power relations in Israel/Palestine. The focus on narrative in academia and the popularity of storytelling among NGOs specializing in peace education have contributed to the idea that violence in the region is the result of an ethno-national conflict between two sides struggling for dominance and peace can be achieved through promoting cross-cultural and interreligious
understanding through personal story. Along with an increased emphasis on subjective individual experience, his approach has elicited anger from Palestinians, especially those from marginalized and impoverished refugee communities:

There is a trend now to focus on Palestinians not as a political subject from Palestine but as a human being. Bullshit. I am not saying we do not need to focus on the personal problems. But there is some sort of directed effort to sway attention away from the political problems and onto the personal and the individual, and this is the danger. (Sukarieh and Tannock 2012:502)

As a researcher using idiographic phenomenological methods, I am acutely aware that such approaches can be used to camouflage political repression and to generate false parity between oppressor and oppressed. In working with a ‘mosaic’ of subcommunities, I recognized that the mosaic was not smooth: some pieces are pressed lower than others. A system of violent *hafrada* [segregation] exists in Israel/Palestine and it is impossible to detach the young people’s stories from their political context. This was uncomfortably illustrated when I shared an article about the Nakba on my Facebook page. An Israeli friend, a university professor originally from the USA, made a lengthy comment about the justice of her decision to immigrate. She concluded by saying that she would share the article, as “we only know our own stories, and this bloodshed won’t end until we know each other’s.” A Palestinian friend reacted in anger: “You’re lucky enough not to know about us unless you want to, but actually we’ve been cleaning your fucking toilets long enough to know your stories.” In focusing on storytelling and the face-to-face relation, I was not attempting to deflect attention from the wider political system, but rather to demonstrate how young people make sense of their histories, interpret their present-day experiences, and think about belonging within that system.

This can be achieved through making a distinction that many story-based peace education programs fail to make. While personal stories are vivid, ambivalent, and complex, the overarching political structure in which they are told is not. I have had several discussions with Palestinian and Israeli activist friends who are concerned with the way that appeals to understand the situation’s “complexity” are used to obfuscate the stark oppressive realities that Palestinians endure. The story that springs to mind when I hear proponents of Israeli military policy (and even members of some prominent peace groups) responding to concerns about water justice or minors in army custody with, “It’s a complicated situation,” is *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. However, it is true that on an individual level, this starkness is no longer present, as demonstrated by Palestinian and Israelis of widely differing politics who
read the thesis and whose reactions were brittle and yet sympathetic. A friend in Gaza telephoned me, half-laughing, half-belligerent. “No, you’re not going to make me feel sorry for them.” As the months passed she continued to enquire after Israeli participants in the study.

Finally, storytelling is not an apolitical act. In Rogers’s image of an ending – of the storyteller “walking out backwards” from the narrative space – we find dynamics of power: people walk backwards from authority, from sacred sites, and sometimes from a threat. Storytelling can also be read as an act of political resistance or subversion, or a way to assert one’s humanity in the face of dehumanization – the face-to-face relation insists on that recognition. The young people seemed aware of this, and when asked to close the storytelling session by saying anything they would like, they frequently ended by challenging how others might perceive them. “I am not a terrorist,” was uttered several times in Palestinian communities. One girl in Hebron quoted her teacher: “We’re not here to upset anybody and we’re not here to make anybody happy. We are here because we are here.” Budour added, “I want you to know that after the fight we had the other day, about army [she and Jewish peers had argued about conscription], we all went to my house and played on the trampoline… This is what our village is.” Yuval commented, “I hope people outside will read what you write and see that the situation is not just about bad Jews.” Their final act was to emphasize community, expressing appreciation for it and asserting their place in it.

Asking those final questions – “Is there anything more you want to add?” “What questions do you think I should have asked, but didn’t?” – made me confront my own role in shaping both the ending and the storytelling as a whole. As discussed earlier, I remained sensitive to young people’s reactions to my prompts and adjusted them accordingly. I also tried to keep questions broad and non-directive, enabling the storytellers to choose which path to take. However, my choice of my prompts, my wording, and numerous factors beyond my control (being a foreigner and female, for example) undoubtedly influenced the stories that were told. The unexpected twists and turns taken by many stories form a meaningful reminder of stories that were not told and questions that remained unasked: I was stunned when Noga responded to “What do you think of when you hear the word ‘Gaza’?” with an unhesitating ‘Shuja’iyya’, having prepared myself to hear ‘darkness’ or ‘empty space’ (recurring images offered by Israeli youth). Every time I was jerked out of my own expectations in this way, I was reminded of the existence of stories I had not heard or enquired after. As a result it does not matter that the stories gathered cannot be considered ‘representative’ in statistical or demographic terms, or that there is no way to be completely
non-directive when conducting story-based research, as each story leaves space for others to follow, space for shock. Storytelling, like life, is governed by a certain amount of chance. This is clear from how Amal chose to end our last storytelling session, by referring to one of the many poems that hang on her bedroom wall to indicate how precarious and incidental she considers her place in the refugee community about which she is so passionate:

There is a poem by Mahmoud Darwish, and actually it’s very connected to the theme that I’m very stuck and very lost, and I’m living very by chance. ‘Dice Player’. It’s like he didn’t choose to be born Palestinian, he didn’t choose to be born with this father and this mother and these brothers and these sisters, he didn’t choose anything. He was created by chance and living by chance. Any little detail that changed in his life, maybe he wouldn’t exist right now. Just like all the events in my life. Sometimes I think by chance I got to university, by chance I was born in a refugee camp, by chance I’m still alive sometimes. And like I said, life is full of surprises and you can’t foresee the future. That’s enough. I’ve already talked too much.

I think of chance and surprises on my last bus ride before returning to England. Dusk has fallen and the windows are streaked with rain. Beit Jala checkpoint, route 60. A soldier clambers on board. He’s not going to make the passengers queue in the rain, I think, interesting, his unit is usually the worst. Just ahead of me, a Palestinian girl aged no more than seven is chatting quietly to her rain-beaded reflection, in Hebrew. “Shalom, Meron, manishma? Kol beseder?” The soldier stops beside her. “Hey, are you talking to me? My name isn’t Meron, I’m Daniel.” The girl sighs exasperatedly and responds in Arabic. “No, of course not you, I’m speaking to my friend on my cellphone.” “You have a friend who speaks Hebrew? Where is he?” Tutting from the girl. “I don’t know. I haven’t met him yet.”

I look at the soldier’s face, briefly reflected in the window. When this girl grows up she may still be meeting him, or someone dressed just like him, every day on the Route 60 checkpoint, assuming she has a permit to travel. Or things may have changed and she will have her Hebrew-speaking friend. Who knows? I look at the soldier’s reflection, now streaked by rivulets of rain, and see that the child is no longer looking at his face in the window but staring out into the darkness blanketing the hillside. He checks permits without saying anything more. The bus drives on to Jerusalem.
Bibliography


### Appendix 1: Table of Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Story text</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>Junayd: “This isn’t me, this is a soldier…I like the soldiers. I love them and I hate them. I hate them when they do these things, like now, but they are like us. I think they are like us when they go home…You can’t go inside [their homes]. They level their guns at you.”</td>
<td>Boundary between self and Other is blurred. Necessary to clarify who is being spoken about. Mixed emotions towards the Other.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hebron child (1): “I think their [Israelis’] favourite place would be their homes.”</td>
<td>Home and violence both central to how the Other is imagined.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hebron child (2): “No, you mean our homes.”</td>
<td>Desire to see self through Other’s eyes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yara: “I do hate them, yes…[W]hat do their parents tell about us and what did they used to tell them about the Palestinians. Maybe that’s the only question I’d like to know. How they see us, how they talk about us, how they imagine us and what we think…I think we should mix with them and start to know more about them, and they know more about us.”</td>
<td>Desire for more interaction coexists with feelings of hatred. Curiosity the possible link.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yuval: “[A] real connection there isn’t…It’s not like I can go and play basketball with them…I’m close to the Arabs in here. When you live close to someone, you – first of all, I believe that I will know more and I will understand more…There will be less hatred and people who can’t talk to each other. So I try to know things.”</td>
<td>The Other sometimes experienced as distant and unknown and other times as close and familiar. Curiosity emerging.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nurit: “I think for me personally, because of the attacks that have been, since I’m small I always think Arabs are scary. Always. And I know it’s not right, because in my class in Holland we had an Arab girl and she was very nice. I mean, it’s not like – it’s –”</td>
<td>Awareness of different streams in own thinking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Stav: “They’re kids our age, so they probably like the same things we like, and I – I really don’t know any kids my age who Arab, not one…[I]t’s wrong to separate kids so much, and I think we’re closed off to a lot of people who we could have been friends with and known and learned from…From kindergarten we should have been together.”</td>
<td>The Other imagined as similar on the basis of shared age.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spatial metaphors (‘closure’) used to convey lack of knowledge of Other. Opposition to segregation.</td>
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| Shifting spatial boundaries / fluid conceptualization of territory | Budour: “They [Jewish peers] don’t think it’s very realistic that everyone would live in this way, but they do consider this place as a positive and a good place. They always want to visit and to see it, and they ask me a lot of questions about how it goes.”

Noga: “[Army is] a different experience, I think, it’s not like the regular life from what I’ve seen. It makes you meet people you don’t meet in your life…It will be my first time meeting a lot of secular people, not just religious people…I want to serve in the Civil Administration because then I can meet Palestinians as well…”

Rafael: “You can see the houses – authentic Arab houses, and you think…well, who lived here seventy years ago and what happened to that family and where are they now? … Sometimes you go and you see Arab houses and you think, “What happened there.”

Natan: “Bethlehem? No way! What it’s like living there? Do you know any terrorists?”

Amr: “Now we want you to tell us a story about them [Israelis].”

Inquisitive about integration even while viewing it as unrealistic.

Rites of passage (e.g. army service) and transit areas (e.g. checkpoints) seen as opportunities for encounter.

Questions about the Other are awakened by the physical environment.

Curiosity is characterized by fear and desire to hear more. |
| Tahani: “The soldiers come from Israel…It’s very far away.”

Reem: “It’s hard to stay here with the soldiers and the wall. I’ll go somewhere else…Bethlehem or Beit Jala. There’s no occupation there.”

Yuval: “I know the soldiers would put [the labourers] back in Palestine…[T]hey [Palestinians] need to come here so they can have a better life.”

Stav: “[Gaza] is a problem, but we can’t deal with the whole world’s problems, we have enough problems in a tiny little country…[W]e still have rockets thrown at Tel Aviv and at Ra’anana and Kfar Saba and at our area, and it’s not |

A sense of remoteness from the Other, even when in close physical proximity.

Surrounding areas viewed as far away/ very different when living in an area of high friction.

Geographical/national entities spoken about as distant.

Increased violence (e.g. rocket fire) |
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<tr>
<th>The violent past as part of the self</th>
<th>Amal: “1948. As a refugee I’ll always come back to that date...It’s the beginning of my life...When you read a lot about 1948, you think you’ve lived a certain event, but of course you didn’t.”</th>
<th>Past violence is not viewed in chronological terms but experienced as foundational to the person’s life, despite time elapsed.</th>
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<td>Budour: “The Nakba is very important to me. Even though...I haven’t experienced it, it feels like a very big part of me.”</td>
<td>Past violence described in intimate terms (e.g. as a relative or as some intrinsic quality).</td>
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<td>Rafael: “As I grew older I started being more and more interested [in the Holocaust]... because it was such a big part of my family.”</td>
<td>Violence is central to self-concept.</td>
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<td>Noga: “[The Holocaust] is strong in me.”</td>
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<td>Junayd: “I would come back. I would always come back. To look at the wall. If I didn’t come back I would forget what they did to us, and that’s like forgetting me.”</td>
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<th>Precarious journeys</th>
<th>Rafael: “[M]y grandfather’s brother...almost got out...he went on a ship...and the Russians thought it was a Nazi ship so they sank it. And he has another brother who was basically shot in the train station.”</th>
<th>Public transport is identified as dangerous (historically and in present day – many participants report fear of buses, bus stops, hitchhiking).</th>
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<td>Yuval: “[W]hen you’re near the checkpoints here, you’ll see – when I go on trips, you can see a lot of Arabs in lines, people who came to Israel to work.</td>
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Trucks came, and they’re put in trucks. Something like – it sounds horrible, how I describe it.”

Yara: “They told me to go back. I was crying and my mother, she said a few nasty words to the soldiers and then they told her to go back. So we went back.”

Maha: “[T]he soldiers didn’t let us through, there was a problem with the papers, or they wouldn’t let us pass…and my mother was crying and even my father cried.”

Stav: “I didn’t want to go to the pool because if you’re stuck in the pool and there’s a hazaka [siren] and I didn’t really want to go anywhere I didn’t know the miklat [shelter] was.”

Nurit: “[T]hey call it the Green Line, which is where it belongs to Israel completely and where there are also – where it’s Territories. So our grandparents, they live across the border, and we weren’t in contact with them until a few years ago, so until then I never really went to the Territories…[I] saw that there’s people standing there checking if you’re OK to go in or if you’re banned, so…obviously not a green line.”

Amal: “It was difficult to see my sister getting married, very far away from me. At that time, not having ID to travel, Jerusalem sounded very far…I feel the distances everywhere, between me and my mother and me and my sister, between me and my brothers and my father – well, physically maybe I’m in my room so I’m physically in my father’s house, but I don’t feel that I am – I don’t feel home.”

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<th>Journeys function as metaphors, especially in relation to forbidden history or experiences of political violence.</th>
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<td>A strong sense of being trapped. Truncation of journey or activity means encounter with the Other.</td>
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<td>Fear of enclosed spaces, and being unable to move.</td>
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<td>Family conflict and domestic happenings provide a template for understanding the region’s political violence, the geography of occupation, and vice versa.</td>
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<td>Sense of dislocation, lack of belonging, incomplete journey.</td>
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Appendix 2: The Storytellers

This list provides brief biographical information about the young people whose stories are quoted most frequently.

**Abed** is a 10-year-old Palestinian boy from Aida refugee camp, the second of three children. He is rarely out of the company of his cousin and close friend, Junayd, and he is an active participant in Al-Rowwad Centre’s homework club and afterschool program. He lives in the immediate vicinity of the separation barrier and a watchtower, which were constructed before he was born, and he has hardly ever travelled outside Bethlehem area. He is interested in Palestinian party politics and describes himself as a supporter of Fatah.

**Amal** is a 19-year-old Palestinian girl living in Dheisheh refugee camp, the daughter of a mother who holds a West Bank ID and a father with Jerusalem residency. She is the youngest of five siblings. Following her parents’ divorce in her early teens, she has lived with her father, her stepmother, and her three brothers in an arrangement that she refers to as ‘my mini-patriarchy.’ She studies at Bethlehem University, where she is the only refugee in her class. She describes herself as secular, left-wing, and politically active. She decided to participate in this project out of a love of literature and creative writing.

**Budour** is a 15-year-old Palestinian Muslim girl with Israeli citizenship. Unusually she attends a Jewish high school. She was born in Jerusalem. During the Second Intifada, when she was a toddler, her family moved back to the cooperative Jewish-Arab village of Wahat as-Salaam/Neve Shalom (her father had lived here before her birth). Her mother is a journalist, and Budour feels that her political consciousness was largely inspired by her relationship with her mother.

**Junayd** is a 12-year-old Palestinian boy from Aida refugee camp, the good friend of Abed. He is in the middle of several siblings. He is very serious about education, but dislikes school because of the use of corporal punishment. He enjoys doing art and decided to take part in this project as he thought it would be an opportunity to draw, and “a way to learn how other people think and say what I think.” He describes himself as a supporter of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), in contrast to the camp’s Fatah and Hamas factions.
**Noga** is an 18-year-old Orthodox Jewish girl from a small rural settlement in the West Bank, the youngest of six siblings and the only daughter. She is keen to serve in the army and is currently in a preparatory program, the only student in her class at an all-girls’ religious high school to opt for military service. She sees this as a way of expanding her community horizons and the possibilities available to her as a woman. She decided to take part in the project “because my teacher saw the advert and knew it’s the kind of thing that interests me.”

**Nurit** is a 16-year-old Orthodox Jewish girl from the middle-class town of Ra’anana, the eldest of four siblings. She is especially close to her sister Stav, who is nearest her in age. She is a music student and a keen dancer. She attends a unique Jewish school that brings together religious and secular students, as she found her previous all-girls’ religious environment too stifling. She avoids watching the news and considers herself to be not very knowledgeable about political topics. She is descended from Holocaust survivors, something she treats as significant but rarely speaks about even within her family.

**Rafael** is a 15-year-old Israeli boy who describes himself as an Arab Jew. His father’s family are Holocaust survivors from Austria and is mother’s relatives are from Yemen. Born in Jerusalem, he has attended the bilingual school Yad b’Yad from kindergarten and for the past two years has been a peer counsellor at a coexistence-oriented youth group, which he joined because “I was curious to see what kids who’ve grown up segregated are like.” He is a member of a Reform Jewish synagogue.

**Rana** is a 15-year-old Palestinian Muslim girl with Israeli citizenship, a friend and classmate of Rafael at Yad b’Yad. She lives in a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood, something she finds uncomfortable. She hesitated to speak much about her family during the project, preferring to concentrate on her school community.

**Stav** is a 15-year-old Israeli girl from Ra’anana, the younger sister of Nurit. She attends a religious girls’ high school, which she does not consider to be religious in a meaningful way. She leads a Bnei Akiva group (a chapter of an Orthodox youth movement), a commitment that requires her to walk for several miles each Saturday. She describes herself as in support of “keeping the Territories” and she actively follows the political news. Like Nurit, she is interested in women’s rights, and she valued the time spent in an international school in the Netherlands when she was younger as an eye-opening experience.
Yara is a 16-year-old Palestinian Catholic girl who was born and raised in a middle-class neighbourhood of Bethlehem, attending a private school staffed by nuns. She has one younger brother to whom she is close. Her father is Dutch and she holds citizenship of the Netherlands. She is currently preparing for her high school graduation exams and is excited about the possibility of spending a year in Amsterdam after finishing school, as she views life there as more relaxed. She is especially looking forward to experimenting with different fashions, which are sometimes a source of tension between her and her mother. She is active in a youth group for Muslim and Christian girls.

Yuval is a 17-year-old Israeli boy who was born in Jerusalem and now lives in a rural Orthodox Jewish settlement in the West Bank, which he describes as very close-knit. He has several siblings (he did not specify the number). His religious faith and community are an important part of his life and he is involved in various forms of civic service and volunteering, such as a summer camp for children with special needs. His parents are both children of concentration camp survivors, something that has had a big impact on him. Like Amal, he was motivated to take part in this study by an interest in literature and creative arts.