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## “EVERY SPERM IS SACRED”: PALESTINIAN PRISONERS, SMUGGLED SEMEN, AND DERRIDA’S PROPHECY

### Abstract

This paper investigates the contemporary phenomenon of smuggling sperm from within Israeli jails, which I treat as a biopolitical act of resistance. Palestinian prisoners who have been sentenced to life-imprisonment have recently resorted to delivering their sperm to their distant wives in the West Bank and Gaza where it is then used for artificial insemination. On the level of theory, my analysis of this practice benefits from Jacques Derrida’s commentary in *The Post Card* on imaginative postal delivery of sperm to distant lovers. I use Derrida’s heteronormative implication to examine how Palestinian prisoners defy the Israeli carceral system via the revolutionary act of sperm smuggling. The article then argues that smuggling sperm challenges the conventional gender codes in Palestinian society that see women in passive roles. Drawing on Derrida’s metaphorical connection between masturbation and writing, I problematize the perception of speech/orality as primary in traditional Palestinian culture. Women, who mostly act as smugglers, become social agents whose written stories of bionational resistance emerge as a dominant mode of representation.

**Keywords:** gender; Jacques Derrida; IVF resistance; Palestinian prisoners; sperm-smuggling

Jacques Derrida’s *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* includes a text called “Envois,” which is a series of letters addressed to a mysterious female lover. In the text, Derrida writes:

The emission of sense or of seed can be rejected (postmark, stamp, and return to sender). Imagine the day, as I have already, that we will be able to send sperm by post card, without going through a check drawn on some sperm bank, and that it remains living enough for the artificial insemination to yield fecundation, and even desire.<sup>1</sup>

Derrida’s comments link epistolary correspondence and semen, which he treats as a possibly rejected “postmark” or “stamp.” However, Derrida’s connection between “artificial” insemination, the postal communication of desire, and a sense of futurity implies a powerful imaginative prediction of coming events. Who thought that someone would be able to produce sperm that “remains living” in “some sperm bank” to be posted and used later for insemination and then “fecundation”? The reference Derrida made in 1980 to “some sperm bank” and the dissemination of sperm via the postcard was indeed

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prophetic. Since 2012, this prophecy has become a real practice by Palestinian prisoners who have recently adopted the strategy of smuggling their sperm outside Israeli prison cells for the purpose of inseminating their wives.<sup>2</sup>

By “Palestinian prisoners” I mean the more than 5,000 political prisoners in Israeli jails who are currently serving life sentences for offences that range from stone throwing and burning tires to killing Israeli soldiers. They are normally classified by Israeli authorities as security prisoners, a designation that subjects them to extra restrictions by Israeli prison laws, especially the denial of conjugal visits, which is brought into public awareness by local and international media on a daily basis.<sup>3</sup> According to Sigrid Vertommen, these restrictions have “far-reaching consequences for the desires of Palestinian prisoners,” including Walid Daka, who has been jailed for twenty-five years, and whose requests for conjugal rights have continually been rejected.<sup>4</sup> Vertommen suggests that for Palestinian prisoners “every sperm is sacred,”<sup>5</sup> because it entails a subversive act of resistance either literally by forming children or symbolically by circumventing prison laws and producing children who signal hope and freedom to their families. According to Vertommen, the value of sperm as a biopolitical act of resistance stems from the fact that the Zionist project in Palestine is rooted in the definition and development of Israel as a Jewish state. This entails the containment of the Palestinian population since 1948, a population which “has continued to pose an existential threat to the Jewish collective body.”<sup>6</sup> Rhoda Kanaaneh writes that demography is intrinsic to the nationalistic philosophy of Zionism. She asserts that the very definition of Israel as a Zionist state is based on the politics of numbers, in that the early Zionist settlers saw the dispersion of Palestinians and the increasing numbers of Jewish citizens as important to the establishment of a “mono-religious” Jewish state.<sup>7</sup>

“Nationalist biopolitics,” therefore, becomes a concern not only for Zionists but also for Arab Palestinians, in the sense that women’s bodies in both polities are the center within the production of national discourses.<sup>8</sup> Both sides of the political conflict understand the significance of women’s bodies and health in demographic warfare or in what Kanaaneh refers to as birthing the nation. To imprisoned Palestinian husbands and their wives, physical disconnection threatens the concept of procreation within the Palestinian socio-political context, which lays emphasis on the rhetoric of war and the persistence of military conflict. For Palestinians, children are the national fuel of not only the demographic struggle between Israel and Palestine but also any possible war that may erupt between the two countries.

In fact, the prisoners’ unconventional resistance via the smuggled sperm cannot be separated from the wider historical formation of the resistant body in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Since 1948, the body of the Palestinian fighter has been a site of resistance through armed conflict with Israeli forces. One popular example of the development of the Palestinian body as a vehicle of resistance is suicide bombing. Matthew Abraham believes that suicide bombing by Palestinians “became a biopolitical strategy and a legitimate form of anti-colonial struggle” following seventy years of suffering, frustration, and betrayal.<sup>9</sup> In the past few years, Palestinian prisoners added another layer to biopolitical resistance by undertaking hunger strikes, employing the body “as a means of making a political or social statement.”<sup>10</sup> The biopolitical body, in this sense, is a movement between the Palestinian subject and political or national commitment to resistance,

which, through Derrida's eyes, I read as a performance against Israeli state power and prison laws.

The contemporary Palestinian practice of smuggling sperm and in vitro fertilization (IVF) can be read in parallel to Derrida's figurative communication with his female lover in *The Post Card* and his discussion of masturbation in *Of Grammatology*. In the former text, sperm "functions like the postcard (a public/private message circulating among positions and along channels which are determined by networks of state power)."<sup>11</sup> Derrida here takes issue with state power's practice of censoring communication, draws checks on sperm banks, and derails the function of sperm/postcards. Similarly, Palestinian prisoners, whose bottled sperm becomes a political function of the post, are disposed to Israeli state power, which limits this function. Both Derrida and Palestinian prisoners seek to create a sort of power that delimits the state's networks and/or undermines its censored channels. On the other hand, Palestinian prisoners and Derrida act for the sake of universal truths. Lorenzo Fabbri suggests that Derrida's desire to have children is associated with "the Socratic desire to conceive general, universal truths . . . to leave an indelible trace of one's self."<sup>12</sup> Likewise, for Palestinian prisoners these children will become creative traces of universal political truth and justice that resist a deliberate process of speechlessness imposed upon their parenting prisoners by Israeli power state. Within Derrida's logic of identity, the trace does not only imply the loss of the origin. As Derrida argues, "within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it [trace] means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace which thus becomes the origin of the origin."<sup>13</sup> The trace here undoes the traditional ontological meaning of political presence by marking the absent non-original other as a possibly present original self. Derrida's discussion of the trace as the non-presence of present, theoretically speaking, can help account for the Palestinian prisoners' isolation or absence as the becoming of power and originary presence via the child as the trace. The child/trace not only comes as present affirmation of the absent Palestinian other/father who is denied by the Israelis; the child/trace also manifests the prisoners' nonorigin in their society only to affirm their powerful return to presence and symbolize their resistance to the Israelipolicing of subversive correspondence.

For Derrida, the child stands for a perpetual desire to move beyond his own fear of circumcision by becoming the trace where the self is reproduced via writing. Whilst the prisoners endeavor to defy the Israeli authorities, move beyond jail bars, and regenerate themselves by begetting children, Derrida's "Circumcision" bespeaks his anxiety about the ability to (re)produce as a consequence of cutting the foreskin. I deploy Derrida's concern to read contemporary Palestinian prisoners' fear of incarceration and its effect on the cutting of their bodies from the social world, especially their wives. In attempt to authorize the procreation of children and to reattach themselves lawfully to their social body, Palestinian prisoners and their families have been seeking fatwas. Although Islamic religious authorities have different views on the subject, which I examine in the second section of this article, the act of sperm smuggling is eventually recognized as a socio-political and human necessity in various discourses of *fiqh al-sujūn* and multiple fatwas that legalize IVF, especially in the case of long prison terms. I argue, nonetheless, that masturbation and the legalization of IVF demand a rereading of the place of prisoners' wives and a reshaping of gender-specific concepts such as

masculinity/femininity and speech/writing in Palestinian oral culture, where “the institutional legitimacy of the oral tradition derives its authority from the centrality of the word to Islamic thought and the word’s legendary association with divine revelation.”<sup>14</sup> Sharif Kanaana suggests that Arab, here Palestinian, cultural hegemony functions as the divine-based male authority of orality and heroic action over other forms of expression. If there is any glory given to Palestinian women, it only “comes from their association with male heroes.”<sup>15</sup> I argue, however, that masturbation, sperm smuggling, and IVF challenge this association and general Palestinian social views about the role of women and their position as secondary members in their society. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida associates masturbation with writing and suggests that both are vital to originary speech or masculine oral presence. The fact that Palestinian prisoners have developed masturbation as a supplement to originary presence (or sexual intercourse with their wives) necessitates the use of Derrida’s theory. In fact, Derrida’s deconstruction is also fundamentally concerned with the traditional binary system where opposites such as orality/writing and men/women are defined against and prioritized over each other. I employ this theory to criticize conventional relations between Palestinian men and women within the new politics of sperm smuggling. The employment of Derrida’s philosophy will also be helpful for exploring how gender roles are problematized in Palestinian society, where women become major participants in this process.

#### COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE ISRAELI PENAL SYSTEM

The Israeli prison is a site of power contestation between jailors and jailed, a place where communication, material and verbal, can be completely subversive. Within the Israeli penal institution, conjugal visits and correspondence take place under the constant surveillance of jailors and cameras, and the communicative acts of Palestinian inmates are controlled, dispossessing them of agency.<sup>16</sup> The concept of agency in the case of Palestinian prisoners implies how they understand the Israeli construction of power and react to ensuing political actions. This means that Palestinian agency is tied to knowledge of existing power relations, which provides an excellent opportunity “to see Palestinians through their own eyes.”<sup>17</sup> Prisoners, in other words, embody the meaning of agency by moving out of their passive roles and engaging with sociopolitical practices such as smuggling sperm, which symbolizes their resistance of victimization and desire for freedom. Elia Zureik suggests that sperm smuggling and IVF are nationalist strategies tied to “the confrontation with Israel” due to their reproductive or demographic threat to the Israeli state. Smuggling sperm, according to Zureik, is also a subversive act of resistance because “it is about confronting the state in its daily brutal pursuits and in its carceral prison policies.”<sup>18</sup> In his BBC news report, Jon Donnison suggests that the Israeli Prison Service (IPS) is suspicious of the truth about sperm smuggling. Donnison reports that Sivan Weizman, the Prison Authority spokesperson, states that “one can’t say it did not happen. However, it’s hard to believe it could happen because of the tight security measures being taken during the security prisoners’ meetings with their relatives.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the strict surveillance of the IPS does not necessarily mean that smuggling sperm “did not happen”; Donnison reports that in 2013 ten Palestinian children were born from sperm smuggled in plastic cups and bottles that managed to escape the limitations imposed by the IPS.

In order to ensure the prisoners' position of inferiority, the prison system has to enforce a regime of *noncommunication*, *nondelivery*, or, to be metaphorical, *no-letters/postcards*. As Esmail Nashif argues,

Prison is meant to disconnect its inmates by isolation; at least, this is the aim of its builders and owners. By contrast, the inmates of the prison seek incessantly to communicate and to reconnect themselves to each other and to their society. The channels of communication of the imprisoned are excellent locales for examining the contested sites of the material culture. The body of the prisoner is one of such sites, which the prison authorities circulate in a very regimented order.<sup>20</sup>

Nashif explains here how the Israeli penal system always endeavors to exclude Palestinian prisoners from internal and external networks. The prisoner's body is a material site that is "circulated in a very regimented order," in that it functions as a passageway into a clear-cut power system where the Israeli jailor represents the high authority and prisoners the subordinate party. Nashif states that communication within Israeli prisons can be "verbal, and hence limited to the joint presence of the sender and receiver," or material.<sup>21</sup> Prisoners' material communication refers to the exchange of objects between prisoners themselves or between them and their families. Material contact includes a diversity of written communication that travels from Israeli prisons to the Palestinian community in the West Bank and Gaza or vice versa. In *Palestinian Political Prisoners*, Nashif mentions a variety of forms of written communication that were representative of "material culture" during the 1980s and 1990s, including "letters, books, poems and military orders, among other kinds of information."<sup>22</sup>

The most surreptitious and subversive of these forms is the *kabsūlah* (capsule).<sup>23</sup> During the 1980s and early 1990s, the *kabsūlah* was a material form that carried private information and hence provided some political agency to Palestinian prisoners. Nashif writes that the *kabsūlah*, which "has a cylindrical shape about half a centimeter in radius and three to four centimeters long," is made manually by folding the paper that contains the prisoners' private messages and wrapping it in strong layers of plastic. When the plastic edges of the *kabsūlah* are burned, the paper takes a "cylindrical" shape and becomes easy to smuggle within prison cells and out into Palestinian society. Each *kabsūlah* normally "contains ten to fifteen such papers, and sometimes even more,"<sup>24</sup> depending on how tight the paper is folded, and is normally concealed inside the prisoner's body. The concealment of *kabsūlahs* inside the prisoners' body creates a double space that subverts the jailors' agency and makes communication possible. Nashif argues that the *kabsūlah* redefines "the borders of the colonizer's annexed space and the limits of the colonized contested body."<sup>25</sup> The *kabsūlah*, in other words, renegotiates the "colonized" body as a flexible subject that functions as a biopolitical substance capable of extending and reaching the social world outside the prison cells. During elections, for example, imprisoned political leaders can influence and contribute to the making of Palestinian politics by liaising with the public through smuggling. The voices of these prisoners can have an impact on the general opinion of voters and political activists.<sup>26</sup> Such impact happens through the *kabsūlah*, which transforms into a vocal channel as it replicates the prisoner's voice by doubling itself as a communicative body-within-the-body.

The language embedded within the *kabsūlah*, however, involves danger and resistance: what the *kabsūlah* envelops might be sensitive and detrimental to the prisoners' safety. If the *kabsūlah* that contains radically political information is detected by the IPS, it can

lead to prolonged confinement and physical torture for those convicted of hiding it inside their bodies and passing it to others.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the language of the *kabsūlah* encodes meanings of resistance of the victimized through leaving the victim's role and coming to terms with understanding power. Lila Abu-Lughod redefines resistance as "a growing disaffection with previous ways we have understood power."<sup>28</sup> She deromanticizes resistance as bravery and "creativity of the human spirit," and calls upon scholars to read it as "a *diagnostic* of power" or as a point of entry into the evaluation of forms of domination.<sup>29</sup> In the words of Michel Foucault, one does not read power of the dominant only negatively, but also positively because "it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, [and] produces discourse."<sup>30</sup> Israeli exercise of carceral power can thus be positive because it brings about the prisoners' political agency through resistance. In the case of Palestinian prisoners who smuggle *kabsūlahs*, their resistant practice of smuggling discloses power relations and unveils the process and strategies of carrying out these relations in a way that makes possible the reading and exposure of Israeli interior power politics.

Nashif writes that the *kabsūlah* "might be put in the mouth under the tongue, put in the rectum or swallowed . . . under the watchful eyes of the prison guards, the *kabsūlah* is delivered from mouth to mouth while kissing across the netting that divides families from inmates."<sup>31</sup> In Nashif's interview with Fahid Abu al-Haj, who managed to write a book that he communicated to his wife throughout the entirety of his imprisonment in Israel, the latter states:

My wife received around sixty *cabsulihs* from me. . . it was the whole book that I wrote in the prison . . . when I was released I unwrapped it and started to copy the book . . . after two months *Fursan al Intifadah* [*The Knights of the Intifada*] was published and it reached most of Palestine.<sup>32</sup>

Abu al-Haj's *kabsūlahs* were symbolic of political agency by exposing certain knowledge and understanding of power and Palestinian prisoners in relation to dominant structures of the Israeli carceral system. Al-Haj could not be physically present in the West Bank, but his words made it there, as if he figuratively moved beyond the prison bars via his smuggled language, which symbolizes both a body of diagnostic knowledge of Israeli power relations and his metaphorical freedom. Although Nashif does not explore the practice of smuggling sperm at the time of his writing, a practice that has developed in the last six years following the increased ferocity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,<sup>33</sup> I read all forms of smuggled material within the Israeli power apparatus as part of the overall political context of sperm smuggling. To perpetuate Nashif's discussion of biopolitical resistance, I argue that the prisoners' secretive delivery of sperm is a linguistic/material form of communication that Derrida *imagined* or anticipated when writing *The Post Card* in 1980.

In his communication with his beloved woman in *The Post Card*,<sup>34</sup> Derrida states that the child is "the impossible message between us."<sup>35</sup> The subject of the child runs through "Envois" as something unworkable. For Derrida, the writer/sender, the child "never will be, never *should* be a sign, a letter, even a symbol."<sup>36</sup> As the textual reproduction or sexual "reproSuction" of Derrida's postal correspondence with his beloved,<sup>37</sup> the child is a major obstacle that stands in the way of one-to-one communication. Derrida's sense of the impossibility of the child can be located in the term "reproSuction": the child falls between repro- and suction, or giving and taking back. The child is a state of presence,

but, as an impossible presence, s/he must be sucked back. Although Derrida's child is impossible, it is the absent medium or key through which futuristic readers are able to enter the world of Derridean prophecy. Put differently, the child still symbolizes a state of aspiration—the aspiration for the impossible, or the reworking of the impossible. For some prisoners serving life sentences, the child similarly belongs to the realm of the impossible: s/he falls between reality and imagination. The absence of sexual activity between prisoners and their distant wives throws the child into the world of imagination and makes the idea of production akin to fantasy. Yet fantasy also functions as a psychic bond between the Palestinian prisoner and his political cause and nationalistic self. Yael Navaro-Yashin believes that fantasy offers "unconscious psychic attachments to the very object (e.g., the state, the nation, public discourse)."<sup>38</sup> For Palestinian prisoners, fantasy becomes an expressive "force of the political" that keeps their ties with their community, nationalism, or state "as an object of desire."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the procreation of children from within Israeli jails remains an enduring state of fantasy that is deeply rooted in the prisoners' psychological commitment to a wider Palestinian national/state cause.

By becoming procreative within their confined spaces, the prisoners prove that the child is an actual possibility, and that they want to produce, act, and move beyond the prison. In both Derrida's and Palestinian prisoners' cases, the (im)possible child stands as a prominent feature within the phenomenon of sperm communication. The (im)possible child is an affirmation that the seed has made its way to the world, just like the writing of the circumcized child Derrida, hence the analogy between productive prisoners and reproductive Derrida. In "Circumfession," the circumcized child Derrida provokes an analogy between circumcision as the colossal danger of cutting or loss and the need to write or reproduce the self: "*circumcision remains the threat of what is making me write here, even if what hangs on it only hangs by a thread and threatens to be lost.*"<sup>40</sup> If, for Derrida, circumcision is a dangerous bodily act of cutting or being cut from the world, incarceration is a threatening condition of being cut from the social world because it entails a state of non-procreation for Palestinian prisoners.

Derrida's anticipation of the postcard that is capable of carrying the semen, traversing the borders of language, and subsequently delivering the child, recalls Palestinian prisoners' practice of sending their sperm across "the green line," as it came to be termed, that separates Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.<sup>41</sup> Historically speaking, the "green line" refers to the borders that separate Israel from neighboring Arab countries before the 1967 War, and the parts of these borders that lie between Israel on the one hand and the West Bank and Gaza on the other hand since 1987. Mark Tessler suggests that "the green line" developed as an indispensable ideology and rhetoric in "Israeli political consciousness" following its influence on the Israeli community since the second Intifada in 1987.<sup>42</sup> The Intifada changed the political perceptions of the Israeli individuals who "regard the West Bank and Gaza as zones of insecurity."<sup>43</sup> This sense of insecurity, I believe, also equally reflects on the lives and future of Palestinian prisoners whose desire for production is endangered. Derrida's insecure, traumatic experience of circumcision during childhood arguably bespeaks the fear of Palestinian prisoners in terms of productivity. The fact that Derrida's circumcision metaphorically constitutes a threat to communication and productivity by means of cutting the foreskin of the penis can be likened to the frustrating, nonproductive experience of Palestinian prisoners who cannot reach beyond the borders of the "green line." Derrida's fear lies in his inability to reach beyond

the contours of his body, one of whose purposes is to deliver the message, the child, or the possible future of Derrida's system of signs/writing. Derrida and the Palestinian prisoner alike resort to writing and/or masturbation, respectively, as a way of aspiring towards the impossible, or the child. Whilst Derrida uses the postcard as a vehicle of self-reproduction following the traumatic experience of circumcision, the Palestinian prisoner makes recourse to masturbation and smuggling sperm to cross into the self and recreate it via the child.

Meaningful productivity for Derrida and Palestinian prisoners, it may be argued, also lies in the concept of crossing. In "Circumfession," the red circular line marks the distressing experience of Derrida's circumcision: the nauseating "*blood is mixed with sperm or the saliva of fellatio*."<sup>44</sup> The red line that is left as a result of circumcision around the foreskin separates Derrida from production and invokes the possibility of the death of creativity, a line that the young Derrida still hopes to cross via writing and dissemination. Similarly, the green line that separates Israel and the West Bank is also an obstacle to all attempts by Palestinian prisoners to send sperm. The green line invokes scary feelings for the wives who, subject to perpetual Israeli surveillance, try to cross to the OPT, smuggle their husbands' sperm, and procreate the child. The red circular line around the foreskin of the circumcised child Derrida and the green line that separates the Palestinian prisoner's body and sperm, or envelope from the wife's womb, are detrimental, threatening lines to progress and procreation. However, by rewriting the sperm in "*a pronounceable letter*" and posting it to his beloved or imaginary readers in *The Post Card*,<sup>45</sup> Derrida moves beyond the red line that also separates death and writing, or absence and presence. Both Derrida and Palestinian prisoners move beyond the red line of circumcision and/or social disconnection, and overshadow an imagined future in which the postcard metaphorically becomes the carrier of sperm. As I started writing this article in 2014, I read in the news that Husam al-'Attar, a thirty-year-old Palestinian sentenced to an eighteen-year prison term, has now fathered his first baby, a girl he named Jannat, via sperm that was smuggled out of the prison and dispatched to his wife in Gaza.<sup>46</sup>

The name Jannat, meaning "gardens" in Arabic, conveys a symbolic message from within Israeli prison cells. Jannat literally refers to Eden and greenness; metaphorically, it denotes a futuristic paradise for Palestinian prisoners. The transformation of semen that finds its way outside the prison into greenness, youth, or children implies hope not only for the prisoner al-'Attar but also for the entire Palestinian nation. For Palestinian prisoners fatherhood is normally regarded as a political or even nationalistic achievement, because it shows they have succeeded in circumventing the IPS. What matters here, therefore, is the practice of sexual/textual regeneration, writing for the future or the communication of bodies far beyond Derrida's red line or the Israeli "green line." The message, to put it simply, should be: never stop writing and/or masturbation, which is a "dangerous supplement" that Derrida thoroughly associates with [Rousseau's] activity as a writer.<sup>47</sup> In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida suggests that masturbation is dangerous because it comes to supplement the originary, which is the natural coitus between man and woman. Derrida links masturbation and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writing activity, arguing that for Rousseau masturbation becomes a productive act. Derrida, by contrast, equates masturbation with dangerous writing that supplements nature or speech, thus giving autoerotism a significant place within the order of things: nature/culture, speech/writing, or coitus/masturbation. For married Palestinians, masturbation is a threat to marriage,

natural desire, and procreation in the traditional sense of how marriage is perceived in Palestinian society.<sup>48</sup> Yet the fact that prisoners are incapable of being naturally intimate with their wives has recently made them realize the value of masturbation and the practice of sperm smuggling in shaping their personal and political dreams of liberty.

For Palestinian prisoners masturbation turns into a value of pleasure because it results in procreation. Marcia Inborn cites the Islamic scholar Ahmad Ibn Hanbal’s commentary on the pleasurable value of masturbation, which “is permissible for prisoners, travellers and ‘indigent, lonely persons who did not have access to a lawful sex partner.’”<sup>49</sup> The value of masturbation as pleasure thus manifests itself “as a means to prevent *zinā*, or illegitimate sexual intercourse.” Masturbation, in addition, is meant to relieve the human body of “a harmful accumulation of semen in the testicles,”<sup>50</sup> and this adds to its pleasurable value because it implies the avoidance of pain and death and the improvement of physical health. For Palestinian prisoners, the value of masturbation is not only limited to pleasure as they are banned from conjugal contact but is also associated with the privilege of procreation. Inborn argues that in Islamic societies men are responsible for “creating human life, which they carry as performed fetuses in their sperm and ejaculate into women’s waiting wombs.” This, of course, problematizes the place of women in these societies, where “only fathers (and by extension, father’s relatives) are the true ‘blood’ relatives of their children.”<sup>51</sup> In this article, by contrast, I use the practice of masturbation in order to reread cultural concepts of fatherhood because women question the patriarchal monopoly of procreative activity, a topic I turn to in the final section. Yet, the broad configurations of the acts of masturbation and “fathering” children as symbolic of national resistance and *ṣumūd* show that for the Palestinian demographic future, “every sperm is sacred.”

#### DO NOT SPILL YOUR SEED!

Masturbation evolves as an initial significant step on the journey of Palestinian political revolution, in the sense that masturbatory acts and later sperm smuggling culminate in producing children despite incarceration. Although these masturbatory acts and artificial insemination carry rich national signification, they have recently been brought into question. Given the emphasis on the application of Islamic law in Palestinian communities, insemination by the use of prisoners’ *smuggled* sperm has unleashed a set of ethical disputations among scholars and religious authorities. Part of the social and religious fear of sperm smuggling and IVF is the possible ubiquity of a new culture of masturbation and postal communication that could threaten natural sexual intercourse between husbands and wives. Islamic discourses on masturbation generally suggest that masturbators are akin to selfish pleasure-seekers and view masturbation as “a distasteful form of sexuality.”<sup>52</sup> Fuad Khuri refers to an unconfirmed hadith stating that masturbators “will not be seen on the day of resurrection.”<sup>53</sup> The Shafi’i School also considers masturbation as *ḥarām*, a repulsive act that must be forbidden unless performed between husbands and wives during sex. The act of spilling sperm, Khuri suggests, is ambivalent in Islamic tradition; although it is necessary to procreate children via ejaculation inside the vagina, sperm itself is considered impure waste and repugnant pollution.<sup>54</sup> It is, therefore, the duty of Muslims to purify their bodies after either sexual intercourse or *coitus interruptus* (masturbation), especially before they go to pray.

The two famous Islamic scholars Sayfuddin and Muhametov also urge that masturbation should be illegitimate; it is an act that is usually frowned upon by Islamic law.<sup>55</sup> Islamic law, generally, lays great emphasis on the institution of marriage and natural insemination. Spilling the semen is an evil deviation of personal desires that must be preserved for healthy marriages and the production of children. Addressing physical health and cleanliness, Inborn suggests that “semen is a pollutant for women’s bodies as well.” Inborn exemplifies the defiling nature of semen by describing how Egyptian women douche and purify their sexual parts every time they have sexual intercourse.<sup>56</sup> However, male masturbation is also seen as necessary to ward off evil sexual deeds, particularly *zinā*. Some Islamic scholars such as Ibn Hanbal go against the Shafi’i school by justifying the practice of masturbation as lawful when “a legitimate partner [wife] to satisfy sexual lust” with is absent.<sup>57</sup> Here Ibn Hanbal rationalizes the performance of masturbation for certain groups of people, including “prisoners.” In fact, prisons in Islamic societies have their own shari’a (collection of religious laws) which includes answers to puzzling questions about masturbation, conjugal visits, and procreation. Despite the jurisprudential differences among Islamic schools such as the Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi’i, and Hanbali over the right of prisoners to intimate conjugal visits, it remains under the authority of the judge to issue laws of permission or denial. Recently, many different religious authorities have issued fatwas permitting Palestinian prisoners to procreate children due to its politically loaded significance in which the acts of masturbation, sperm smuggling, and IVF are uniquely perceived as tools of bionational resistance.

The news reporter Naela Khalil writes that “many Palestinian religious scholars, such as Mufti Ikrima Sabri and Hamas leader Hamid Bitawi, issued a fatwa years ago permitting the wives of prisoners to become pregnant through their husband’s sperm smuggled out of Israeli jails.”<sup>58</sup> Since 1980, a number of fatwas on IVF have been issued in the Middle East. These fatwas have acknowledged that despite a lack of references in the Qur’an and hadith to medically assisted conception, these main texts “have affirmed the importance of marriage and family formation through material procreation, as indicated in the opening paragraphs of the Al-Azhar *fatwa*.”<sup>59</sup> Among the religious bodies that have issued fatwas recognizing the significance of IVF within the context of procreation are the Islamic Fikh Council in Makka (1984) and the Islamic Education, Science and Culture Organization in Rabaat (2002). Nowadays the abundance of fatwas encouraging IVF makes Palestinian women and their imprisoned husbands feel more confident with this process, especially now that society has granted a moral blessing on this “heroic” act: “today a hero was born to a hero,” said Tariq, the brother of a Gazan inmate sentenced to twelve years in prison.<sup>60</sup> This positive social reception, which considers the prisoner/father a “hero,” has caused a drastic increase in the number of successful artificial inseminations in the West Bank and Gaza, leading in turn to the gradual rise of sperm smuggling as a new form of Palestinian *ṣumūd*.

Palestinian prisoners’ autoerotic acts give hope to families whose lineal descent is threatened by distance and involuntary separation and whose national struggle needs to be sustained. Therefore, sperm must be regarded not as mere waste but rather as political hope for liberty and a tool of defying the Israeli prison authorities, even if only symbolically. The meaning of hope here is tied to the Palestinian culture of *ṣumūd*, a term that literally means “steadfastness” and entered the dictionary of political resistance in the 1970s following the demise of Palestinian hopes for political freedom and self-

determination.<sup>61</sup> The term *ṣumūd* conveys the meaning of "being connected to the Palestinian land, to home, and daily life." To Mary Grey, *ṣumūd* not only symbolizes the value of peace, beauty, and joy, but also signifies the community's suffering, sacrifice, and struggle against powers of domination.<sup>62</sup> Raja Shehadeh, a Palestinian lawyer living in Ramallah, calls *ṣumūd* the third way situated between acknowledging the occupation and choosing to fight against it. *Ṣumūd*, in Shehadeh's words, "is watching your home turn into a prison. You, *ṣāmīd*, choose to stay in that prison, because it is your home, and because you fear if you leave, your jailer will not allow you to return."<sup>63</sup> The autoerotic practices of Palestinian prisoners, who are situated between accepting the Israeli jailer and rebelling against him, can be read as biopolitical actions of *ṣumūd*. Although "autoeroticism" causes a deadly "waste and a wounding of the self by the self," as suggested by Derrida,<sup>64</sup> it is equally important to note that the prisoners' autoerotic actions develop as a reproductive practice that adds another level to Palestinian *ṣumūd*; it is a spilling/writing for the future, for presence and resistance. Children who are born outside Israeli prisons and nicknamed "ambassadors of hope and freedom,"<sup>65</sup> bear the responsibility for future confrontations with the Israeli occupation.

In an interview with a Palestinian ex-prisoner who fathered his second child while serving fourteen years in Israeli jails, T. F. narrates that the idea of smuggling sperm to his wife in the city of Jenin in the West Bank "was not taken seriously by his family and friends who argued that this act might bring shame to us." Following an increase in IVF treatments in the West Bank in the last two years, "my family," says T. F., "seems to have accepted this idea and supported me throughout the whole process." T. F. mentions that his action must be looked at as "a national story of success, especially because he faced many difficulties before he finally managed to smuggle his sperm."<sup>66</sup> Like other Palestinian prisoners whose acts are regarded as forms of national resistance, T. F. exemplifies how personal and political desires are essentially tied. In fact, masturbation and smuggling for Palestinian prisoners are radically and politically charged.

Derrida's *Of Grammatology* reminds us of Jacque Rousseau's comparison between the personal and the political. Rousseau shows that the opposite dualism of personal and political and/or self and society is perfectly natural, but that nature is a pure, self-sustained system that needs no supplement is a foregrounding fact. Derrida, however, writes that this dualism must be renegotiated on the basis that private and public discourses are, indeed, intertwined. In liberal political systems, for instance, domestic practices and teachings such as loyalty and commitment are supposedly significant to the rise and stability of healthy political communities. Derrida seems to suggest that civil societies arise from the simple notion that nature is insufficient and "requires supplementation because it is *incomplete* in itself."<sup>67</sup> To Derrida, masturbation and self-pleasure, which go against nature in Rousseau's erotic world, follow a similar logic: for Rousseau masturbation is a great erotic experience that is no less natural than heteroerotic relations because it stems from natural desires and turns into "the only means of experiencing satisfaction completely and directly."<sup>68</sup> Like Rousseau's *un-natural* experience where one gives oneself to internal pleasure, Palestinian prisoners' private act of masturbation is gratifying. Yet the prisoners' autoerotic experience is also tied to an external motive within which the political self is made present. If Rousseau was an extravagant dweller in an "ideal world which my fertile imagination soon peopled with beings after my own heart,"<sup>69</sup> the prisoners' acts of masturbation unveil a process of national imagination

that involves the pleasure of victory over jailors and incarceration. Derrida writes that despite Rousseau's enjoyment of beautiful imaginary sensations, he "lived in anguish." Masturbators, like Rousseau, live with the internal responsibility of "the threat of castration that always accompanies it [masturbation]. Pleasure is thus lived as the irremediable loss of the vital substance, as exposure to madness and death."<sup>70</sup> Masturbation inside Israeli jails, on the other hand, carries singular symbolisms of life, hope, and freedom, resulting in the continuous production of politically stable communities that bolster the Palestinian nationalistic individual living under Israeli occupation. Whereas Rousseau's autoerotism is a private form of pleasure and responsibility, Palestinian prisoners' autoerotic acts can turn into public celebrations of familial success and national pride.

Derrida refers to the postcard as an imaginary medium of sperm/child communication; Palestinian prisoners literally make use of various ways to deliver sperm. Donnison reports that Palestinian women "bring the sperm to his [doctor] clinic in anything from small bottles to plastic cups."<sup>71</sup> Indeed, smuggling sperm in plastic vessels articulates the symbolic value of prisoners' masturbation, which metaphorically signifies the transference of the child across the green line. The semen that turns into a full-grown baby, provided that artificial insemination is successful, is the starting point of the migration of children. The wives' concealment of their imprisoned husbands' sperm invokes the imagery of children fleeing the confining space of Israeli prisons. If sperm that is successfully smuggled and used by wives for insemination becomes a fetus and later a baby, it is fair to say that smuggling symbolically transforms into a process of migration. However, this process could entail carriage or miscarriage; in the latter case, the semen may die during border crossing. Salem Abu Khaizaran, a fertility doctor who has been helping these wives, says that "sperm can survive for up to 48 hours before it is frozen in order to carry out IVF treatment."<sup>72</sup> Abu Khaizaran's words show that the preservation of semen and the speed of its delivery are medical necessities for the procreation of healthy children. At a wider political level, the prisoners' semen is a significant bionational supplementation that makes possible the migration of children into a state of political presence and stability.

Palestinian prisoners' reliance on masturbation and private messengers, mainly wives, to dispatch their sperm receptacles across the border has emphasized an ideal supplement of natural coitus, and thus a new form of sexual representation and gender relations. That prisoners cannot be physically intimate with their wives in a Palestinian society that foregrounds the presence of the man within the family circle as the *speaking* authority undermines the patriarchal role, in favor of the new dialogic of masturbation and/or writing. Whilst the Palestinian father "represented the top of the hierarchy, with central decision-making authority,"<sup>73</sup> Cheryl Rubenberg suggests that women and their actions entail "silence and total seclusion."<sup>74</sup> Rubenberg argues that the authority of speech has conventionally emerged as a masculine quality. This masculine culture of speech, however, is undermined by the primacy of written sources in the telling of history that privileges colonial archives at the expense of Palestinian oral history. Rashid Khalidi suggests that history is mostly written about strong nations, and it is the views of those who write and read well that historians record. Historians' unresponsive attitude to the oral history of illiterate Palestinians, which "complicated the modern historiography of Palestine," is not the only reason for the displacement of the Palestinian narrative of

historical conflict in favor of the Israeli archive. Khalidi points out that "much source material for writing the modern history of the Palestinian Arabs has been lost, destroyed, or incorporated into archives in Israel."<sup>75</sup> The denial of the Palestinian spoken narration of the history of their struggle against Israel in favor of Israeli archival power means that Palestinian oral history, which is traditionally designated as masculine, cannot then be taken as serious. If speaking can thus turn into a culture of silent historical suffering and powerlessness as Palestinian patriarchs are dispossessed of agency, women's silence logically becomes a normative gender dynamic. In the context of masturbation, which is a silent form of rebellion, the wives of Palestinian prisoners reclaim power as active agents of history in which their published written stories of sperm smuggling on media challenges the Israeli colonial narrative and decolonizes the oral male history of resistance. If "the 'culture of silence' insures that women's pain—physical and psychological—will be suffered without complaint . . . that the female 'self' is least prioritized,"<sup>76</sup> then masturbation by male prisoners becomes a form of silent and secluded pain that insures a less masculine status. Masturbation into plastic vessels becomes an unconscious process of humiliation for prisoners. In psychological terms, the act of masturbation incurs not only shame but also anxiety. Sigmund Freud makes links between masturbation and the anxiety of castration as a possible punishment,<sup>77</sup> hence the prisoners' internal fear of self-consumption and wasted masculinity owing to their incapability of performing sexual intercourse with their wife. Here, it is also worth mentioning that masturbation evolves as a method of psychological humiliation where prisoners are "forced to masturbate in front of interrogators."<sup>78</sup> Whether prisoners masturbate voluntarily or involuntarily, masturbation remains a form of punishment that plays a significant role in manipulating gender relations within the Palestinian family.

This new shift in the sexual politics of Palestinian culture, I argue, subverts the position of speech as central and writing as marginal. Conventionally, Palestinian culture prioritizes speech, especially *speaking men*, over writing.<sup>79</sup> The meaning of masculinity is foregrounded in speech and performance as pivotal sites of social representation, action, and presence. Although the national identity of Palestinians includes both men and women, only "masculine performativity" defines it.<sup>80</sup> Joseph Massad notes how Yasir Arafat's speech incorporated a slippage of gender reference. Arafat's use of "Palestinians" sometimes implied men and women; however, at other times the word "Palestinians" "slips into men."<sup>81</sup> The slippage of the Palestinian nationalist agent into the masculine world shows how speech and performative nationalist actions belong to men whereas women are silent participants in domestic and political discourses. On the other hand, the lack of speech/performance, and thus presence, within Palestinian society due to imprisonment pushes prisoners into secondary means of reproduction. In order to re-enact presence within their societies, these prisoners turn to masturbation and/or writing, symbolically speaking, to initiate life, children, or speech, which are only made possible by women's agency. If death by writing, as Derrida argued, "inaugurates life,"<sup>82</sup> prisoners' semen also stimulates life via masturbation and/or writing, and "to write is indeed the only way of keeping or recapturing speech since speech denies itself as it gives itself."<sup>83</sup> Semen "inaugurates life" for Palestinian inmates even though masturbation *per se* insinuates a humiliating recession to writing and postality within their cultural context.

## BACK TO WRITING: THE SHAME OF SPERM

Whereas sperm in this case is smuggled by bottles or cups, writing is sent in envelopes. Both are inferior forms of communication and subject to the law of miscarriage. Sperm receptacles can function as postcards that fulfill Derrida's prophetic suggestion of the possibility of seminal correspondence, which Palestinian prisoners employ as an alternative, productive mode of communication. Male prisoners realize that to defy Israeli carceral restraints, they have to accept that masturbation and/or writing is the only means of production. Yet to be dependent on masturbation and/or writing is to recognize one's new place in the social order: what is natural becomes a strange cultural practice and what is masculine becomes feminized in the conventional sense that men recede to a silent, secluded mode of procreation. If male prisoners turn into "mere" masturbators and/or writers, their partners take full action outside Israeli prisons by carrying out IVF treatment and occupying the public media. Although some of the prisoners' wives are not educated enough to write about their experiences of smuggling sperm and IVF, their stories are often communicated through female journalists and writers who consider this new practice an opportunity to redefine the Palestinian female body and its capability of shifting traditional social and gender norms, even if partially. Two of these writers, Susan Rahman and Tara Dorabji, have transformed the silence of brave Palestinian women into sensational stories of resistance. In Rahman's and Dorabji's published works, the Palestinian Lidia Rimawi, wife of a political prisoner serving twenty-five years in Israeli prisons, narrates that her newly born son "Majid is our victory. I did this to challenge the occupation."<sup>84</sup> Not only did Lidia's patriotic description of smuggling sperm occupy the main subject matter of Rahman and Dorabji's writing in a newspaper article; it also became an intrinsic part of Rahman's book *To Resist is to Exist: The Voices of the Women of Palestine* published in 2015. Rahman's manuscript solely sheds light on Palestinian women—including Lidia—who detail their stories of bionational *sumūd* in interviews which Rahman rewrites in her book, as if she were the writing agent of the prisoners' wives. According to Vertommen, who also finds Lidia's story a unique opening to her article, it is "easy to congratulate the mother" and thus employ her story as a written document; the father is "only present through his absence,"<sup>85</sup> which in turn is made possible by the mother's use of IVF and/or presence in terms of making their written interviews public.

Women's public writing of successful IVF stories, however, comes at the expense of the prisoners' feelings of alienation and inferiority as they withdraw to secondary positions within the Palestinian gender order, in which the voices of these heroic prisoners are made present via women's bionational resistance. To deliver sperm from inside the Israeli prison cells is to diminish oneself within the patriarchal symbolic order and power representation. Palestinian men should be present in the flesh within the family circle to rule and procreate; absence is detrimental to manhood and patriarchal authority. Conventionally, Palestinian patriarchal culture "places men . . . in privileged and powerful position over the life and well-being of women and the family as a whole."<sup>86</sup> This traditional thinking, argues Rubenberg, emanates from the ideological concept of "'honor and shame'" in which women are treated as sexual objects in need of constant male protection.<sup>87</sup> The term "honor," according to Lila Abu Lughod, also suggests complete submission to patriarchal authority. Although Abu Lughod's discussion mainly focuses on

Bedouin communities and is not directly relevant to Palestinian society, one can still recognize shared cultural experiences. Abu Lughod, for example, writes that "women are always dependents, as the most common term of reference for women, *wliyya* (under the protection) indicates."<sup>88</sup> The masculine safeguarding of honor functions as a license to control "women's sexuality and bodies,"<sup>89</sup> and part of this honor logic is the prevention of certain speech that may incur sexual harm in the form of rumors and gossip. The patriarchal discourse of honor thus deprives women of *oral* expression, especially sexual expression: it is a man's duty to make sure a woman's body is physically and morally intact or pure. Rubenberg argues that the "honor code" for Palestinian women "entails absolute sexual purity . . . self-restraint and self-effacement, decorousness in dress and *speech*, and seclusion."<sup>90</sup> For women to gain respectability, they "must deny their sexual interests," which eventually differentiates them from "those who represent the social order."<sup>91</sup> In an interview with Rubenberg, a twenty-one-year-old single Palestinian girl named Ghada relates:

When I was in school, I used to sometimes talk to a boy on the way home, but gossip put an end to that very quickly. People used to come to my father and say: "I saw your daughter talking to so and so . . . her behaviour is shameful."<sup>92</sup>

Ghada's words show that *speaking*, especially to strangers, is a "*shameful*" act that demands male intervention. Ghada's language unfolds a traditional discursive division of gender roles, which prisoners' wives problematize via smuggling and writing. In fact, imprisonment has challenged the boundaries separating *speaking* men and *passive* women. The fact that Palestinian prisoners cannot be present in the flesh and cannot thus speak on behalf of their wives and families generates a surrogate discourse that condemns speech as a primary site of cultural or masculine representation. If a man cannot be present, speak, or consummate passion because of imprisonment, he has to *masturbate*. To reinvoke Rousseau's logic, the prisoner is left with the choice of writing and/or masturbation. In either case the prisoner is left with shame: to be incapable of consummating passion in the flesh is to dwindle in power and retreat behind the act of masturbation. I should point out here that the prisoner's act of masturbation bears a sense of double shame: firstly, the shame of the actual physical act of masturbation for the sake of procreation; secondly, the more buried unconscious shame of writing. It thus follows that it is not a woman's speech that is entitled to shame; masturbation by prisoners is a "*shameful*" act that is paralleled or redoubled by writing.

Whilst women possess the semen and gain biological and symbolic agency through the IVF process,<sup>93</sup> men become reduced to the status of emasculated givers. Once the semen leaves the prison cells and is posted into the hands of prisoners' wives, men's roles end, symbolically in ejaculating and giving, writing, and death. Freud associates masturbation with the "struggle for repression" and the anxiety of castration, absence, or nonbeing.<sup>94</sup> Anxiety of castration provokes the masculine fear of shame and effeminacy via masturbation. That "disease of masturbation," as the Roman Catholic Church termed it, reveals, writes Cath Sharrock, "etymological links between masturbation and effeminacy, as *mol-lites* [pollution] signified both masturbation and effeminacy; an indication that was to resonate in the term 'mollies.'"<sup>95</sup> Within the psychological structure of Palestinian prisoners, although masturbation can be a hopeful act of geographical mobility in that it disseminates or transports the semen/text/child, it is also restrictive as it becomes internally

associated with distance, sexual unfulfillment, and sperm-as-shame. To rely on semen that is smuggled in cups or bottles for insemination is to invoke feelings of insufficiency, absence, and emasculation, a feeling that Derrida also cites in Phaedrus's words to Socrates:

Phaedrus reminds Socrates that the citizens of greatest influence and dignity, the men who are the most *free, feel ashamed (aiskhunontai)* at "speechwriting" and at leaving *sungrammata* behind them. They fear the judgment of posterity, which might consider them "sophists."<sup>96</sup>

Writing is secondary to speech in value; masturbation for Palestinian prisoners is likewise secondary to physical coitus. Those who become involved in either "speechwriting" or autoeroticism are subject to humiliation and sophism (deception). Derrida argues that Alcidas shows contempt for those sophists who are nothing but sick logographic teachers whose writing "is considered a consolation, a compensation, a remedy for sickly speech." The Attic school (Gorgias, Isocrates, Alcidas) believes that "the only ones who take refuge in writing are those who are no better speakers than the man in the street."<sup>97</sup> They carry shame, and are responsible for all judgments that posterity may bestow on them. That writing or masturbation implicates shame brings to light the possibility of what Derrida calls "patricidal subversion,"<sup>98</sup> i.e., posterity denouncing the father as the high-level authority. The position of the Palestinian prisoner is subverted within the new social gender hierarchy, because he no longer stands for what he must traditionally represent. One could argue that the Israeli jail is indeed the prison house of language, and in this context particularly speech, where Palestinian inmates are left with nothing but masturbation and/or writing.

Israeli prisons participate in the inversion of traditional definitions of speech as primary and writing as secondary. They function as houses that limit, if not terminate, speech. Though Israeli prisons are figuratively representative of logocentrism, they hold prisoners who are also conventionally defined as logocentric by Palestinian cultural standards. To return to Derrida's insight, mentioned earlier, "speech denies itself as it gives itself,"<sup>99</sup> meaning in the prisoners' case that the Israeli logocentric prison denies the logocentrism of its Palestinian inmates. The supplement of masturbation or "speechwriting," therefore, labels the *speaking* father as discreditable, culpable, and thus liable to subversion, and this emanates not only from posterity but also from conjugality. The wife, in other words, *supplements* the imprisoned husband who is incapable of representation. It is the wife or the writing agent who comes to replace Palestinian prisoners' speech as sickly and insufficient. One must remember that writing, which has always been treated as an inferior form of communication, becomes a tool to fight power and mark it as other. Even if writing were to turn into a site of shame for Palestinian patriarchs, it represents a force of regeneration as it makes meaning in the flesh by signifying female desire and subjectivity. Donna Haraway suggests that writing carries the potential of "revers[ing] and displac[ing] the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities." For Haraway, feminist writing recodes "communication and intelligence to subvert command and control" established by "phallogocentric origin stories."<sup>100</sup> The documentation of the wives' post-IVF experiences in the form of written stories displays an emerging faith in writing as an effective means of sociopolitical supplementary representation.

Rahman's book, in which Palestinian women's practices of assisted conception have been transformed into political archives, as well as the news reports that have gone

viral on social media, prove that women have indeed attained the agency of representation over the absented husbands. In her news report, Harriet Sherwood quotes Rimah Silawi, a thirty-eight-year-old pregnant woman, who justifies IVF treatment in a news conference: “We women are growing old and our chances of having babies in the future [are] diminishing.”<sup>101</sup> Silawi’s phrase “We women” shows the general tendency by news agencies to cite women’s experiences of IVF as the best mode of representation. The writing of women’s stories emerges as a new subversive discourse that undermines complete reliance on oral culture and displays patriarchy as subordinate to or dependent on women’s action, pregnancy, or writing, either literally or figuratively. Rubenberg writes that silence is “one of the strongest internal mechanisms of individual [and women’s] control” in the West Bank,<sup>102</sup> yet silence has become substituted by women’s authoritative and active participation in the media and feminist archives. Indeed, Palestinian wives’ stories of IVF, which are often read on news reports and documented in various textbooks such as Rahman’s, have become the sole source of correspondence. It is thus fair to conclude that though speech within patriarchal Palestinian society remains an authoritative medium of representation, the last couple of years have shown that women’s written archives of IVF generate a surrogate discourse of political writing and a new form of sexual expression.

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card from Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 24.

<sup>2</sup>Helen Codd cites other cases of smuggling sperm around the world. In 2002, the *New York Post* reported that an American prisoner managed to smuggle sperm to his wife by bribing the guards, and this resulted in the conception of their daughter. Codd also mentions that the Israeli man convicted of murdering Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 was caught during the smuggling of sperm to his wife. Moreover, the UK is enlisted by Codd as a country where examples of the same kind were registered, such as the Mellor and the Dickson cases. See Codd, *In the Shadow of Prison: Families, Imprisonment and Criminal Justice* (New York: Willan Publishing, 2008), 101–2.

<sup>3</sup>In her recent news report, Isra Namey quotes Um ‘Awad al-Sa’idi, a sixty-four-year-old mother of a Palestinian detainee, as having said that “she was ‘denied all means of communication with our sons, including visits, letters, and they even blocked the use of cell phones between us.’” See Namey, “Gaza: A family’s ordeal to visit a prisoner in Israel,” *Al Jazeera*, 3 June 2016, accessed 13 June 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/gaza-family-ordeal-visit-prisoner-israel-160530082700143.html>. This subject has also been covered by other international media such as the BBC and the *Washington Post* as well as local news agencies including Press TV, Electronic Intifada, Middle East Monitor, and *Haaretz*.

<sup>4</sup>Sigrid Vertommen, “Babies from Behind Bars: Stratified Assisted Reproduction in Palestine/Israel,” in *Assisted Reproduction Across Borders: Feminist Perspectives on Normalizations, Disruptions and Transmissions*, ed. Merete Lie and Nina Lykke (New York: Routledge, 2017), 213.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>7</sup>Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002), 28.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>9</sup>Matthew Abraham, *Intellectual Resistance and the Struggle for Palestine* (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 132.

<sup>10</sup>Caitlin Ryan, *Bodies, Power, and Resistance in the Middle East: Experiences of Subjectification in the Occupied Palestinian Territories* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 117.

<sup>11</sup>Ika Willis, "Eros in the Age of Technical Reproducibility: Socrates, Plato, and the Erotics of Filiation," in *Derrida and Antiquity*, ed. Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 360.

<sup>12</sup>Lorenzo Fabbri, *The Domestication of Derrida: Rorty, Pragmatism and Deconstruction*, trans. Daniele Manni, ed. Vuslat Demirkoparan and Ari Lee Laskin (London: Continuum), 39.

<sup>13</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 61.

<sup>14</sup>Kamal Boullata, "The View from No-Man's Land," in *Discourse and Palestine: Power, Text and Context*, ed. Annelies Moors et al. (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1995), 198.

<sup>15</sup>Sharif Kanaana, "The Role of Women in Intifada Legends," in *Discourse and Palestine*, 155.

<sup>16</sup>For more on the life and treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, particularly the ban on communication, see Firas Abu Hilal, *The Suffering of the Palestinian Prisoners & Detainees under the Israeli Occupation*, trans. Baraah Darazi (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations), 67–69.

<sup>17</sup>Emile Badarin, *Palestinian Political Discourse: Between Exile and Occupation* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

<sup>18</sup>Elia Zureik, *Israel's Colonial Project in Palestine: Brutal Pursuit* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 136.

<sup>19</sup>Jon Donnison, "Palestinians born from prisoners' smuggled sperm," BBC, 15 March 2013, accessed 17 January 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east/21658940>.

<sup>20</sup>Esmail Nashif, *Palestinian Political Prisoners: Identity and Community* (London: Routledge, 2008), 41. See also Nashif, "Attempts at Liberation: Body Materialization and Community Building among Palestinian Political Captives," *Arab Studies Journal* 7 (2005): 46–79.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>23</sup>The *kabsūlah*, or generally referred to as the Irish "comms," was also a material medium that developed as a form of communication in Northern Ireland between political leadership outside the prison and the commanding individuals inside the prison in 1981.

<sup>24</sup>Nashif, *Palestinian Political Prisoners*, 63.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>26</sup>Glenn Robinson argues that the "prison was seen within the Palestinian community as a principal training ground for future activists." Robinson's words imply that the link between Palestinian political activism inside and outside Israeli jails is never lost, here consolidated by *kabsūlah* smuggling. See Glenn E. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Solution* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997), 22.

<sup>27</sup>Nashif writes that the prison authorities are keen to forbid inmates from talking, walking, or sitting together. Since these forms of contact can facilitate the passage of information from inside the cells, the authorities use solitary confinement; Nashif, *Palestinian Political Prisoners*, 47.

<sup>28</sup>Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 21 (1990): 41.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>30</sup>Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Godron (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 119.

<sup>31</sup>Nashif, *Palestinian Political Prisoners*, 63.

<sup>32</sup>In 1992, F. Abu al Haj published his book *The Knights of the Intifada: Talking from Behind the Bars* in Jerusalem; Nashif, *Palestinian Political Prisoners*, 64.

<sup>33</sup>The West Bank and the Gaza Strip are burgeoning fast advances in fertility treatment. Ruth Eglash and Sufyan Taha report that the first successful IVF treatment took place in August 2012. Since then, about fifteen women in the West Bank and six women in Gaza have given birth via the IVF process; Eglash and Taha, "Palestinian Prisoners Are Smuggling Sperm out of Israeli Jails So Wives Can Have Babies," *Washington Post*, 2 May 2014, accessed 1 June 2016, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/palestinian-prisoners-are-smuggling-sperm-out-of-israeli-jails-so-wives-can-have-babies/2014/05/02/f2b7f29e-cc8a-11e3-95f7-7ecdde72d2ea\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/palestinian-prisoners-are-smuggling-sperm-out-of-israeli-jails-so-wives-can-have-babies/2014/05/02/f2b7f29e-cc8a-11e3-95f7-7ecdde72d2ea_story.html). It is also significant to point out here that IVF treatment in Israel is much higher than its counterpart in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. This is due to the Israeli government's concern "with lowering the Arab birthrate as it has with raising the Jewish one"; Jacqueline Portuguese, *Fertility Policy in Israel: The Politics of Religion, Gender, and Nation* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 161.

<sup>34</sup>Derrida “reputedly had a long-standing relationship with the philosopher Sylviane Agacinski, with whom he had a son, but he remained married to Marguerite until his death from cancer in 2004”; Steven Shakespeare, *Derrida and Theology* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 19.

<sup>35</sup>Derrida, *The Post Card*, 25.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 25. Derrida’s emphasis.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>38</sup>Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Derrida, “Circumfission,” in *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffery Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 202. Emphasis in original.

<sup>41</sup>The term “Occupied Palestinian Territories” refers to the lands that were occupied by the Israeli military after the Six Day War between Israel and neighboring Arab countries in 1967, and are still recognized by the UN as occupied. Hereafter I will use the abbreviation “OPT.”

<sup>42</sup>Mark A. Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994), 708.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Derrida, “Circumfission,” 153. Emphasis in original.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 72. Emphasis in original.

<sup>46</sup>*Al-Quds News Network*, 18 February 2015, accessed 22 February 2015, <http://www.qudsn.ps/article/61351>.

<sup>47</sup>Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 155.

<sup>48</sup>“Islam recognises that sex [natural coitus] is a gift from Allah but insists that it may only take place within a marriage. Marriage and family are the basis of Islamic society” to which the OPT culturally belongs. The Prophet Muhammad states that “no institution in Islam finds more favour with God than marriage,” in Jon Mayled, *People and their God* (Cheltenham: Nelson Thomes, 1999), 76.

<sup>49</sup>Marcia C. Inborn, “Masturbation, Semen Collection and Men IVF’s Experiences: Anxieties in the Muslim World,” *Body and Society* 13 (2007): 41.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>52</sup>Inborn, “Masturbation,” 39.

<sup>53</sup>Fuad I. Khuri, *The Body in Islamic Culture* (London: Saqi Books, 2001), 83.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 84–85.

<sup>55</sup>Murad Sayfuddin and Abdullah-R Muhametov, *Love and Sex in Islam: The Collection of Fatwas and Articles*, trans. Irina Smirnova et al. (Cairo: Publishing House Ansar, 2004–11), 44.

<sup>56</sup>See Marcia Inborn, *Quest for Conception: Gender, Infertility, and Egyptian Medical Systems* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

<sup>57</sup>Basim F. Musallam, *Sex and Society in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 33.

<sup>58</sup>Naela Khalil, “Fatwas Allow Artificial Insemination for Wives of Prisoners,” *Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East*, 11 February 2013, accessed 3 March 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fr/originals/2013/02/palestinian-women-impregnated-smuggled-sperm.html#>.

<sup>59</sup>Inborn, *Local Babies, Global Science: Gender, Religion, and In Vitro Fertilization in Egypt* (New York, London: Routledge, 2003), 97.

<sup>60</sup>Nidal Al-Mughrabi, “Smuggled Sperm Brings Baby Boy to Gaza Prisoner’s Family,” *Reuters*, 10 January 2014, accessed 15 February 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/10/us-palestinian-israeli-prisoner-idUSBREA090Q220140110>.

<sup>61</sup>Mary Grey, *The Spirit of Peace: Pentecost and Affliction in the Middle East* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2015), 14.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Raja Shehadeh, *Journal of a West Bank Palestinian* (New York: Adama Books, 1984), viii.

<sup>64</sup>Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 156.

<sup>65</sup>Naela Khalil, “Fatwas.”

<sup>66</sup>T. F., interview with the author, Jenin City, West Bank, 22 April, 2018. I have only used the prisoner’s initials at his own request.

<sup>67</sup>Arthur Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 104.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>69</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1996), 416.

<sup>70</sup>Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 151.

<sup>71</sup>Donnison, "Palestinians Born."

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup>Islah Jad, "Patterns of Relations within the Palestinian Family during the Intifada," trans. Magida Abu Hassabo, in *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank*, ed. Suha Sabbagh (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1998), 55.

<sup>74</sup>Cheryl A. Rubenberg, *Palestinian Women: Patriarchy and Resistance in the West Bank* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 51.

<sup>75</sup>Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 89.

<sup>76</sup>Rubenberg, *Palestinian Women*, 166.

<sup>77</sup>See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1997), 422.

<sup>78</sup>Stanley Cohen and Daphna Golan, "The Interrogation of Palestinians during the Intifada: Ill-treatment, 'Moderate Physical Pressure' or Torture," Jerusalem: B'Tselem, March 1991, accessed 14 August 2016, [http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/199103\\_torture](http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/199103_torture).

<sup>79</sup>Some Arab critics, notably the Saudi Abdulla al-Ghadhami, suggest that speech is a manifestation of femininity whereas writing is that of masculinity. Al-Ghadhami believes that "since woman is meaning and man is utterance, it is necessary that language belongs to man, and not woman . . . and woman has never spoken as a linguistic agent"; al-Ghadhami, *al-Mar'a wa-l-Lugha*, vol. 1 (Beirut: The Arab Cultural Centre, 1996), 8. On the other hand, it is also important to remember that within the specific Palestinian cultural context, speech and oral narratives have traditionally defined masculinity and resistance. Even though women have always been subsumed into a higher Palestinian masculine order of power and colonial struggle, it is through medically assisted conception that women have redefined the body of the Palestinian female, who emerges as the resistant conceiver and writer, in the least symbolic sense.

<sup>80</sup>Joseph A. Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 49.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>82</sup>Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 143.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>84</sup>Susan Rahman and Tara Dorabji, "How Palestinian Women Defy Israel's Occupation: From Mothering a Child to Mourning One, Three Women Share Stories of Steadfastness and Resistance," *Al Jazeera*, 30 October 2015, accessed 4 August 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/palestinian-women-defy-israel-occupation-151029062324106.html>.

<sup>85</sup>Vertommen, "Babies from Behind Bars," 207.

<sup>86</sup>Samih K. Farsoun, *Culture and Customs of the Palestinians* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2004), 38.

<sup>87</sup>Rubenberg, *Palestinian Women*, 33.

<sup>88</sup>Abu Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999), 80–81.

<sup>89</sup>Rubenberg, *Palestinian Women*, 35.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 42. Emphasis added.

<sup>91</sup>Abu Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, 208.

<sup>92</sup>Robenburg, *Palestinian Women*, 42. Emphasis in original.

<sup>93</sup>As the general manager of Razan Assisted Conception Unit in Nablus, doctor Abu Khaizuran sometimes speaks on behalf of his female patients. However, it is also true that the prisoners' wives are the major role-players in the process of smuggling, which is a dangerous journey that has importantly been documented as a gender-related story of success by female journalists such as Susan Rahman.

<sup>94</sup>Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 422.

<sup>95</sup>Cath Sharrock, "Reviewing 'Spirit of Man-Hood': Sodomy, Masturbation and the Body (Politic) in Eighteenth-Century England," *Textual Practice* 11 (1997): 10–19.

<sup>96</sup>Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 68. Emphasis added.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>99</sup>Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 142.

<sup>100</sup>Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge: 2004), 33.

<sup>101</sup>Harriet Sherwood, “Palestinian Prisoners in Israel ‘Smuggling Out Sperm,’” *The Guardian*, 8 February 2013, accessed 22 February 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/08/palestinian-prisoners-israel-smuggling-sperm>.

<sup>102</sup>Rubenberg, *Palestinian Women*, 47.