Revolution after Revolution

The Commune as Line of Flight in Palestinian Anticolonialism

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ABSTRACT What is a revolution that neither overthrows a state order nor institutes a lasting one of its own? What happens if we disassociate revolution—the novel beginning, the break, the upending of order, the social transformation—from the movement of historical necessity that marks it even among the left, and open it instead onto those cases of anticolonial politics that did not play out, at least initially, as a desire for the forward march of progress and its terminus in the state form? In these cases, how do we move past the language, or more precisely, the grammar of failure when talking about revolution? What if the Palestinian Revolution, whose fate follows the rise and waning of tricontinental Third Worldism, might be read not as the defeated end of a revolutionary historical arc but as the start of a line of flight? This essay makes two points. First, what was revolutionary about the Palestinian anticolonial experience was neither the spectacularity of its armed insurrection nor its call for radical equality but its capacity to creatively make autonomous territory and declare communes. Second, reading this history poses questions about what a renewed encounter between the revolution concept and the anticolonial imperative might once again do.

KEYWORDS revolution, anticolonialism, commune, camp, territory, Palestine

What is a revolution that neither overthrows a state order nor institutes a lasting one of its own? The Palestinian Revolution[1] confronts us with the somewhat anomalous case of a twentieth-century anticolonial liberation struggle that did not end in a postcolonial independent state but in the even more starkly tragic denouement of the bantustan[2]—our very own twenty-first-century form of native authority. Yet to read this as a straightforward story of failure or defeat is to miss something. And simply filing it under the long and noble rubric of crushed anticolonial insurrections tells us little about what we might still do or how we might still think with this historical experience. How, then, do we move past the language or, more precisely,

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the grammar of failure when talking about revolution? I don't mean how we get past despair. The despair is real, and in all likelihood inevitable. Nor do I mean how we avoid the tonality or key of tragedy. Neither despair as political emotion nor tragedy as literary tone are synonymous with the evaluative judgments of failure and defeat. Quite the opposite. When the late John Berger mused on the endurance of a Palestinian life familiar, as he put it, with "every sort of rubble, including the rubble of words," he gifted us the name of a stance he called "undefeated despair."[3] If the Palestinian condition has taught us anything, it is that despair and hope are not opposites: it is never pessimism *or* optimism; it is *always* pessoptimism.[4]

The frequent association of revolution with failure is in part the effect of the particular history congealed in the concept. Failure appears as part of an organizing grammar that presupposes the horizon of revolution as always state capture or conquest—the physical seizure and overturning of the apparatus of central government. This is true of accounts of political revolutions in which the ultimate revolutionary beginning is located in a constitutional moment and the founding of a republic (as in Hannah Arendt's work). And it's true of accounts of radical social revolution in which the conquest of the state is both the guarantee of new relations of production and the start of the state's transformation into the means of its own self-negation (as in Lenin's). In the Marxist tradition, it's perhaps Louis Althusser who would give this primacy of state conquest its most sophisticated articulation, declaring it emphatically a question of praxis: "Without revolutionary theory (of the state), no revolutionary movement."[5] Around the same time but within a very different tradition, Arendt, also thinking through the student movements of '68, reached a similar conclusion and phrased it, somewhat reproachfully, as a historical appraisal. "No revolution," she said, "has been able to shake this state concept."[6] This sense of revolution as turning on the conquest of state institutions remains dominant today; our most common assessment of the contemporary insurrections of the last decade is that, by and large, they failed in fully capturing or overthrowing the state beyond its juridical forms.[7] And in the end—precisely as such failures—they never really amounted to revolutions.

But what if this is not what revolution is really about? Or at least, what if it's what revolution is *no longer* about? What happens if we disassociate revolution—the novel beginning, the break, the upending of order, the social transformation—from the movement of historical necessity that marks it even on the left, from what Michel Foucault once called the "law of Revolution,"[8] and open it instead onto those cases of anticolonial politics that did not play out, at least initially, as a desire for the forward march of progress and its terminus in the state form? What if the Palestinian Revolution, whose fate follows the rise and waning of tricontinental Third Worldism, should be read not as the defeated end of a revolutionary historical arc, but as the start of a line of flight?

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To think about a line of flight beyond a canonical and Eurocentric sense of revolution is neither to jettison the concept nor to provincialize or decolonize it per se. Less still is it to juxtapose anticolonial and European revolutionary traditions as though they were uniform and cleanly separable. Europe's own revolutionary history is plural and temporally heterogenous in ways that might be thought of as challenging the dogma of the philosophy of universal history and that history's privileged political form in the modern state.[9] The point is, instead, to think about retrieving some of the layers sedimented in the concept of revolution itself, its multiplicities, which are never—not even in Europe—historically separable from the experiences of anticolonialism.

Looking back at a handful of articles from the Palestinian Revolution's political journals in the 1960s and 1970s, I make two main claims here. First, what was revolutionary about the Palestinian anticolonial experience was neither the spectacular nature of its armed insurrection nor simply its call for radical equality and a secular democratic state but its capacity to *make territory*. That is, what was revolutionary about its practice can be read in its creation of territory that was able to support new collective subjects and new forms of association that upended distinctions between governed and governing; in other words, the revolution was in the making of communes. This practice took shape in the revolution's cities, especially Beirut, but it found its fullest expression in and through the refugee camp that was one of its principal dilemmas. In fact, the revolution, I argue, was defined by a tension or impasse that took shape territorially—in the camps, on territory not its own—between *insurrectionist* and *autonomist* poles, between the *camp-base* and the *camp-commune*. In a very material sense, the camp was both the potential and the limit of the revolution's grappling with a qualitatively different *form* of politics. The disruptive force of the revolution, then, was not, as clichéd commentary still has it, that it created in Jordan and then Lebanon a state within a state, but rather that it created an *antistate within a state*.

Second, I argue that this history poses questions about what a renewed encounter between the revolution concept and the anticolonial imperative might once again do. What are the stakes of opening up the revolutionary perspective, as it reaches again for figurations of the commune, onto a historical awareness of dispossession as one of the organizing logics of our world? What is revolution that stakes its viability on making autonomous territory in ways that reckon with unfinished pasts, outside of any teleology of progressive change? The Palestinian camp-commune was a means of insurrectionary anticolonial struggle, but it was also a form of life demonstrative of what decolonized society could look like. I don't mean to suggest there are lessons per se in this history, or that in itself this history might furnish answers to these questions. But if, for some of us, the memory of this history returns these days, it does so uncoincidentally; it returns because, as Kristin

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Ross writes of the Paris Commune, there are moments when historical memory can "enter vividly into the figurability of the present."[10] The memory returns not only because "Palestine" remains the name for an unassimilable refusal but also because the general insurgency that *is* the global present cannot but reckon now with the wreckage of colonial history directly in its path.

"For There Is No Longer a Camp and There Never Again Will Be"

In a tent, yes, but a tent in a refugee camp is quite different from one in a guerilla base.
—Ghassan Kanafani, *Um Sa'ad*

The Palestinian liberation movement was defined by an almost overwhelming territorial challenge. To become a mass popular insurrection that might recover land and reverse expulsion, the revolution had to form a historical subject *of* movement from a people not just displaced and dispersed but also confined and domesticated by one of colonial modernity's most arresting technologies—the camp. If revolution, conventionally understood, is essentially about the forward movement of time, and if the camp is essentially a spatial device for the immobilization of time,[11] then how does one stage a revolution from within the camp?

The answer for the revolution lay not in an exit from the camps—which could come only with the return to liberated land—but in the transformation or activation of the camps as political spaces. The very viability of a "people's war" (as opposed to "bourgeois conventional war," and here drawing heavily on Maoist thought and the Vietnamese experience) rested on this transformation of the camps from devices of confinement to bases of propulsive insurrectional movement. In an 1969 editorial in *al-Hadaf* published on the eve of the Cairo Accords,[12] which effectively handed over Lebanon's camps from the Lebanese military intelligence apparatus to the PLO's Armed Struggle Command (Qiyadat al-Kifah al-Musallah) and marked the start of the most intense decade in the revolutionary experiment, Ghassan Kanafani laid out the stakes with typical rhetorical directness: the camps would be either "launching pads or detention barracks" (Qawʿid intilaq am muʿaskarat iʿtiqal), and on this choice "the very historical and fateful existence of the revolution" rested.[13]

Yet the question of the camps as historically decisive had been apprehended by Palestinian activists—in what we might think of as the prehistory of the revolution—well before Kanafani rose to a brilliant prominence few have since matched. It is not an overstatement to say that the Palestinian liberation movement started both in and against the camps. And from the start, the territorial predicament was stark. As early as 1950, some two years after the Nakba, activists who would go on to establish the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), the precursor to the Popular Front for

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the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), began entering the camps.[14] They made their way into Lebanon's camps, setting up cells, holding talks, and agitating against resettlement programs; their most immediate antagonist was neither Israel nor the Arab states but the UN agency administering the camps, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). George Habash, later founder of the PFLP, recalled that it was the camp as a space of resettlement that was the primary object of protest: "We began to lecture in the camps to mobilize the masses against UNRWA's plan for re-settlement (*tawtin*)."[15] In 1950 the ANM began fundraising for permanent offices in the camps. Two years after that, in November of 1952, they began distributing their clandestine newspaper, *al-Tha'r*, which was not only aimed at and primarily distributed in Lebanon's camps (though it even made it to large parts of the West Bank, where it was often distributed through high schools) but also perhaps the first publication to take up the question of the camps explicitly and consistently. Every issue had a section called "With the Displaced," edited by a political activist, Abu Mahir (Ahmad al-Yamani), who was also (and not incidentally) a volunteer UNRWA teacher. At the same time, the ANM was involved in incidents of sabotage, the burning or blocking of UNRWA offices, worker strikes, and the disruption of construction work in camps. As early as 1950, UNRWA, in one of its earliest written documents, noted the frequency of food strikes and work stoppages and conceded that "there is considerable evidence indicating that subversive effort is fairly widely diffused amongst the refugees."[16]

The ANM never built an armed cadre itself, but its insistence on the camp as the site of struggle and the refugees as the mass base of the movement would be formative. Things changed rapidly in the mid- and late 1960s. The start of a clandestine guerilla insurgency, the 1967 war, the weakening of state-led, pan-Arab anticolonial nationalism, the Battle of Karamah in 1968, and the explosion of the Palestinian guerilla movement onto the political scene—this historical narrative is by now well rehearsed. Less considered have been the stakes opened up by the place of the camps in all this. In the beginning of 1969, revolutionary groups, by now almost a decade into an armed insurrection, entered and organized Jordan's camps, beginning the shift from clandestine *foco* guerilla formations to large-scale mobilization. A little later that year, they did the same in Syria's camps. And though in the former the experiment would be cut short by the Jordanian army's bloody eviction of the guerillas from Jordan in 1971, it would take even fuller shape in Lebanon after the 1969 Cairo Accords effectively gave the PLO control of Lebanon's camps. This experiment persisted until another bloody eviction of the guerillas in 1982, this time from Beirut and by the Israeli army, culminating in a marine odyssey across the Mediterranean, far away from the camps, to Tunis and into irrelevance.

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But we're getting ahead of ourselves. The period between these two "evictions" is one of radical experimentation in the camps. In the revolutionary literature of the time, the transformation of the camp and the transformation of the Palestinian subject are inextricably intertwined. But beneath this relation, one can also read a marked tension between the camp as a site of *insurrection* and means to an end—the insurgent base of outward and forward bodily movement toward national independence—and the camp as a site of *autonomy* and end in itself—the communal space of novel forms of association, self-government, and exchange in which social relations are transformed. Without overemphasizing this distinction between what are coconstitutive phenomena (a point to which I'll return), I organize my intervention around this tension here.

In what is probably the dominant reading, the relationship between camp and revolution is understood in broadly insurrectionary terms—with the camp as the site of the "rebirth" of Palestinian subjects, their transformation from immobile refugees into mobile militants. A 1969 article in *al-Hadaf*, by the Popular Front's Adnan Badir, gives an exemplary account of the camps under the revolution in what must have been some of the most hopeful early days. Titled "The Transformation of the Camps into Bases!" and written as a first-person account, it starts with an emphatically dialectical observation: "We had an appointment with history in one of those special moments when a new historical stage is born from its antithesis."[17] Here, as in so many other accounts, the transformation or "birth" of a new political subject is described as the overcoming of the camp's physical immobilization—marked in revolutionary texts by the prevalence of the Arabic verb *intalaqa* from the root *t-l-q*, which both connotes the start or beginning of something and the propulsive movement of an object or body in space, like the English word *launch*. Watching young girls and boys train in the camp, Badir lets his eyes wander to the barbed wire that marks the camp's boundaries. "Behind the square, behind the barbed wire . . . are those who have set forth (*intalaqu*) to create history anew."[18] With the barbed wire symbolically and literally removed, the camp takes on an entirely different orientation; it's transformed in a way that effectively overcomes or negates the camp qua camp: "And the first wave of militants graduated from the training bases of the camps—sorry, of the barracks (*mu'askar*), for there is no longer a camp and there never again will be."[19] The gendered imagery of the camp as birthing the insurgent is consistent: "Everything in the camp uttered the birth of something new . . . something born strong and undefeatable."[20] Or, as another article in in *al-Hadaf* had it, "The camps in Lebanon sprout new waves of fighters," complete with pictures of young women and men in the camp's training bases, bodies restored to action, handling guns, fighting in hand-to-hand combat, jumping through flames.[21]

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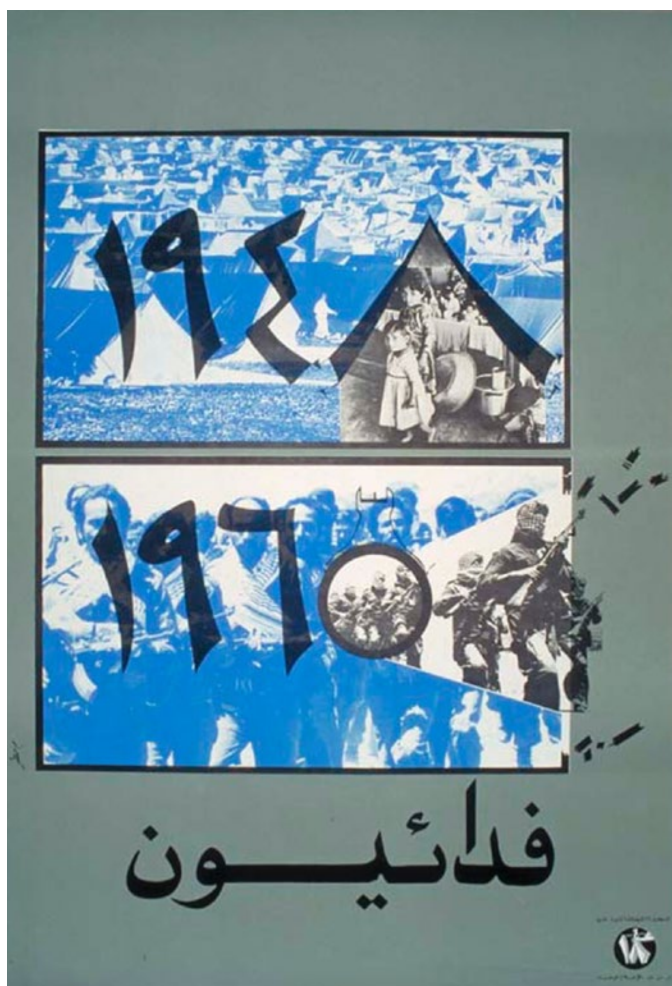

FIGURE 1. *"Fida'iyun."* Poster commemorating the launch of the Palestinian armed revolution in 1965. Muwaffaq Matar, Fateh (1983). Source: The Palestine Project Archive.

In the poster (fig. 1), the overcoming of the tented camp in insurgent movement is animated in unequivocal terms. Two photographs are aligned and juxtaposed vertically. In the first, over an UNRWA image, the Arabic numeral 8 (٨) in the year 1948 doubles as the outline of a pyramid-shaped tent (for the year of the catastrophe is the year of encampment); the beady, sad eyes of children milling around in a cramped tent reproduce an almost iconic humanitarian figuration. In the photograph below this one, the tents are nowhere to be seen, and children have been replaced with young fighting men, marching in tandem. Over the image, the Arabic numeral 5 (٥) in the year 1965 (the launch of Fatah's military operations) doubles as the barrel and sight of a rifle. The tent is replaced with a gun. But this rifle also produces a pathway in which the Palestinian body not only overcomes the domesticated confinement of the tent but smashes the very frame

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of the photograph. Insurrection exceeds the disciplinary and representational limits of the image itself.

In a certain sense, given its historical and territorial conditions, the Palestinian Revolution understood physical movement as the first condition of any form of politics. But in its insistence on the primacy of centralized armed insurrection, the movement was critiqued, even at the time, for effectively bracketing social change.[22] Lutfi al-Khuli, the editor in chief of the left-wing Egyptian monthly magazine *al-Taliʿa*, put forward such a criticism to Fatah leader Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad) in 1969: "Perhaps you are aware of the accusations directed against Fatah, that its activities are limited to the military field without linking them to definite political viewpoints of definite programs and organized popular mobilization of the Palestinian people."[23] Armed struggle, he said, in a critique still made today, appears as an end in itself. Khalaf's reply was to insist that the revolution does not separate or distinguish between political and military action. He went on: "Fatah is criticized, and this may indirectly shed some light on its political line, because it calls only for the liberation of the land and does not tackle the problem of man and society. We say this is nonsense. Liberation of the land cannot be achieved except through the liberation of man."[24] But this is a liberation in which insurrectionary action is supremely constitutive: "Armed struggle purifies the soul, wipes out sensitivity and makes [militants] follow a truly revolutionary progressive course of action."[25] And, for Khalaf and his comrades, the question came back to the encamped refugees as a sui generis revolutionary class that cannot be defined "according to classical lines." The subject of this anticolonialism was neither worker nor peasant. "There are classes and groups which were not known at the time of Karl Marx. Did Karl Marx discuss the question of the class of refugees that has emerged among the Palestinian people?"[26] Ours is a revolution, he goes on, different from other world revolutions because "the people, as is clear, are socially, politically and geographically dispersed."[27]

In the same year, Faruq al-Qaddumi (Abu al-Lutf), another prominent Fatah leader, made similar arguments. The revolution, he argued, has "no specific social ideology" because the struggle is against an occupying power; abstract socialist models cannot speak to the reality of its subject class. And nor does the accusation of being bourgeois have any purchase, since this, too, is an abstraction with little local relevance (here we get very close to the not at all uncommon image of colonized society as classless society). "Any social content requires certain conditions: regional unity (land), social unity (people territorially bound), and political unity (a state)."[28] Territoriality, a place of your own, Qaddumi effectively says, is a prerequisite for class struggle and social revolution.

Those on the left of the movement, principally the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, had a notably different take, one that insisted on the inseparability of class struggle and national liberation. But even among leftist and

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Marxist-Leninist currents of the movement, where "worker" and "refugee" overlapped, it was the nationalist imperative of reversing expulsion and overcoming the camps that always effectively took precedence. The challenge of territory and movement—manifest in the camps—dogged the revolution across its ideological spectrum, and went some way toward shaping its self-understanding and, to some extent, its self-realization as primarily insurrectionary.

"A Space of Absolute Freedom"

Declaring the commune is agreeing to *bond with others*, where nothing will be like it was before.
—The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*

There is another reading of this historical experience, in which the camps are apprehended not just as insurgent bases but also as the autonomous sites of a *qualitatively* different politics. The most sympathetic account we have comes from Basim Sarhan, an activist and pedagogue in the PLO's planning committee, best known for his work on revolutionary pedagogy. In 1975, he published an article in *Shu'un Filastiniyya* (*Palestinian Affairs*) called "The Camps under the Revolution," a remarkable piece of autocritique from the midst of what was an ongoing political experiment.[29] For Sarhan, revolution and camp were historically entangled—only the revolution could liberate the camps, but in turn only the camps could achieve a genuine mass revolution. "Armed struggle did not transform into a popular movement before the emergence of the revolution in the camps."[30]

The revolution, he wrote, had done more than simply mobilize the encamped refugees. In displacing the grip of both the internal state security apparatuses and the agency (UNRWA), the revolution had not simply replaced one source of authority with another; it had qualitatively changed the *type* of authority, transforming "the authority of the administrative apparatus that was running the camps, UNRWA, . . . [into] popular authority."[31]

For Sarhan, entirely new forms of associational life had upended conventional social relations and forms of exchange. In place of this twinned mechanism of control (state and humanitarian), a whole ecology of associations radically transformed everyday life: cooperatives, training camps, youth clubs, workers' associations and unions, student groups, teachers' unions, women's associations, sharing economies, cultural clubs—all of which amounted to not simply a changing of the guard but fundamentally different relations between governed and governing. The camps were now, Sarhan declared, a "space of absolute freedom (*al-huriyya al-mutlaqa*) and popular authority,"[32] the suggestion here being *not* that they were devoid of regulative law but that they were a law unto themselves, literally autonomous; in short, they were communes.

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The figure of the commune was actively cited by Palestinian revolutionary discourse. In one *al-Hadaf* article marking the centenary of the Paris Commune and titled "Lessons from the Paris Commune," the sense of revolutionary continuity in a shared heritage is explicit. The experience of the Paris Commune, the authors wrote, must be "counted among the most fertile militant experiences in history, whose full comprehension is necessary for revolutionaries, particularly in our current situation." The necessity of this historical awareness stems from the Paris Commune's "many similarities with the experience of the Palestinian resistance."[33] Even historical figures resonate between the two contexts, with Wasfi al-Tal (the Jordanian prime minister who presided over the army's massacres and destruction of the revolution's camp-communes in Jordan in 1970) standing in for Adolphe Thiers. Not only revolutionary heroes but also counterrevolutionary villains have their own (maybe even stronger?) inheritances.

Where the camp had been a device for imposing temporal stagnancy, the camp-commune was about a kinetic return to historical movement, to political life, and even to meaningful death. "The revolution turned the camps into cells or workshops, active day and night," Sarhan writes. In place of the "tedium" (*malal*) and "stillness/stagnation" (*rukud*) of camp life, the revolution "took advantage of people's energies and moved them. Everyone became busy"; the image was one of "dense activity."[34] This transpired not only through training camps and revolutionary offices, he notes, but in the daily and nightly meetings, workshops, organizational circles, popular seminars, debates, distribution of roles, allocation of responsibilities. The whole article has a dynamic, excited rhythm and pace that mediates the emergence of a subjectivity that was itself unfixed, unsettled, mobile—Palestinianness *as* movement.

In turn, all kinds of ossified social relations (gendered, patriarchal, generational, clan based, and so on) are seen as having been overturned and replaced. Primary forms of identification shift away from places of origin or clan, marriage is no longer village or clan based, and youth rise in place of traditional, conservative elders. But perhaps most significantly, social relations between women and men change, with the camp-commune destroying conventionally gendered divisions and "liberating women," who "before the revolution . . . were prisoners of the home,"[35] though it should be noted that elsewhere revolutionary discourse itself often slipped back into a gendering of the domestic sphere as feminine and the public or political sphere as masculine, with figures of insurgent heroism often remaining impoverished in that they were persistently male.

Sarhan understood as well as anybody else that the transformation and its autonomy were inseparable from the armed insurrection, but in his account the return of the encamped Palestinian body to consequential movement is not *only* a

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means to armed struggle. The revolution, he tells us, liberated the camps, and this was "the first principal step in the liberation of Palestine," but the sense across his reflections is that it liberated them at least potentially to become something else, something autonomous;[36] a different kind of territory constituted a different subject. In place of "dependency and despair," Sarhan wrote, the revolution effects "a transformation in the very essence of the Palestinian psyche."[37]

Yet Sarhan's account was no piece of propaganda. He concedes the revolution's limitations, and in the last paragraph in his study he identifies the revolution's weakest point around what he calls "social issues." The effects of the revolution, he says, were strong on "the mental and political level, but weak on the social level. . . . For it made no organized or directed attempt to implant (*ghars*) new social values and principles."[38] The values of collective work and self-sacrifice emerged in the camps almost in passing, simply by virtue of the fact of the revolution's emergence. Sarhan bemoans, for example, that the youth centers (Marakiz al-Ashbal/al-Zahrat) intended for revolutionary pedagogy, and which were, as other activists noted, by far the most developed of the popular organizations,[39] were reduced to sites for military training: "A huge shortcoming of the revolution."[40] The fact remains, he goes on, that unlike the Cuban or the Algerian revolutions, the Palestinian Revolution remained removed from "intentional social change."[41] There are two main reasons for this, he explains. One, "the loss of land (the presence of the revolution on a land that was not its own and over which it had no authority), and [two] the revolution's understanding of its principal calling as a political-liberationist (*siyasiya-tahrirariya*) calling, and in turn the orientation of most of its energies toward armed struggle and building a political base."[42] Whereas Khalaf and Qaddumi saw deterritorialization as demanding the primacy of armed insurrection in a bracketing of the social, Sarhan read a deep flaw in the revolution.

"Like Something out of Shakespeare"

> With no territory underneath one's feet it is patently hard to know with certainty what, in an abstract sense, is the best course to steer.
>
> —Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*

Where then does this tension, and the shortcoming around social questions, leave us in a reading of the revolution? Here I want to clarify the stakes around the tensions in the movement between insurrection and autonomy (and between statist and antistatist tendencies), by way of a brief detour into the concept of the war-machine—itself formulated in part in an engagement with the Palestinian Revolution. Another way to conceptualize what I've been analyzing is to think with Deleuze and Guattari's parsing of the transformative potential of any revolutionary

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struggle[43] and to posit a structural tension within the Palestinian movement between, on the one hand, a "negatively" deterritorializing dynamic (that operated its own principal, compensatory reterritorialization, seeking to insert the movement within the state system and consolidate it) and, on the other hand, a "positively" deterritorializing dynamic aimed at the destruction of the state system itself and at the creative composition of a new political body (in which reterritorialization remains secondary). In a conversation with the Palestinian author Elias Sanbar first published in *Libération* in 1982 under the title "Les Indiens de Palestine," Deleuze observes that "the Palestinians are not in the situation of colonized peoples but of evacuees, of people driven out."[44] The question of revolt in the face of expulsion becomes existential but also, for lack of a better word, practical. How do the Palestinians resist in this context? How do they manage, he asks elsewhere, to give "themselves a body which didn't simply represent them but embodied them, outside their territory and without state"?[45] Deleuze turns to Yasser Arafat to note that while both America and Palestine were subject to a type of colonialism that sought to empty territory, an important difference marks the comparison—the Arab world. He cites Arafat, who insists the Palestinians will not "suffer the fate of the American Indian tribes" because of the surrounding civilization, which Deleuze construes in his own language as "a base or force outside the territory from which they were expelled."[46]

The question of Palestine was not just an object of commentary for Deleuze—who in the 1970s and 1980s wrote a series of insightful articles on the subject—but also an influence on the shape of his and Guattari's thought.[47] Gregg Lambert has picked up on Deleuze's commentary on the Palestinians to argue that Deleuze and Guattari had the Palestinian movement, among other historical examples of peoples actually revolting, in mind when they formulated their concept of the war-machine and wrote the "Treatise on Nomadology."[48] He reads across a set of texts to draw connections between the various figures, literary and historical, that recur in the treatise around the image of the warrior—those exceptional, monomaniacal, lawless, and slightly suicidal characters who range from Moses to Arafat, from Richard III to (clearly, the favorite) Genghis Khan.

Yet this form of individuation need not be numerically defined. Indeed, building on but also departing from the work of Pierre Clastres, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that one of the war-machine's key figurations, which seems at times to entirely overlap in character with the war-machine, is a Native or Aboriginal people.[49] A Native or Aboriginal people that refuses to disappear from this world has little choice but to make of itself a war-machine, precisely to ward off the state-form. This is an encounter marked with its own anterior irony and tragedy, since it only ever leads to long struggle and a kind of gradual suicide.[50] They can resist but will "only end up alone, wandering on the outside, distributed across a vast open

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space that lies between states (like a steppe, or a desert), but gradually disappearing or vanishing from the face of the earth."[51]

For Deleuze and Guattari, the war-machine is a type of violence fundamentally exterior and inherently inimical to the state-form, *and* at the same time ultimately vulnerable to capture by that "empty form of appropriations" we call the state.[52] In fact, the irony is that it's only in this capture that the "sudden mutation" that is the rise of the state occurs; the state is formed precisely in the effort to ward off the formation of a state. This "isomorphic incorporation"[53] opens up stark contradictions and leads Deleuze and Guattari to distinguish between two opposing poles in every war-machine: a destructive pole that emerges after the state appropriates the war-machine as an army or military institution in which the latter takes war as its "primary and direct object,"[54] nothing but "a line of destruction prolongable to the limits of the universe,"[55] and a creative pole, which "seems to be the essence" of the war-machine that "only entertains a potential or supplementary synthetic relation with war."[56] Here, war, understood as "pure Idea," is not intrinsic but supplemental, and in fact only the means for creating something else. War is not the necessary object of the war-machine, and the battle is not the necessary object of war; guerilla warfare aims for the nonbattle.[57]

It is to this latter pole that Deleuze and Guattari explicitly link the figures of revolutionary and guerilla or popular war, which they claim are "in conformity with the essence" of the war-machine: "*they can make war only on the condition that they simultaneously create something new*, if only new nonorganic social relations,"[58] something not separable, of course, from creative (de)territorialization. In fact, in a later interview with Antonio Negri, Deleuze reaches for the example of the PLO to explain the war-machine, and turns precisely to the question of producing space or territory; the war-machine, he insists, has "nothing to do with war but to do with a particular way of occupying, taking up space-time, or inventing new space-times: revolutionary movements (people don't take enough account, for instance, of how the PLO has had to invent a space-time in the Arab world), but artistic movements too, are war-machines in this sense."[59]

Yet even Deleuze, for all his admiration for the Palestinian Revolution, was not uncritical or unaware of its more conservative tendencies. His later, and somewhat cryptic, reference to Arafat as someone "who could have stepped out of Shakespeare"[60]—most likely a reference, infers Lambert, to a figure like Richard III, who "slips in, announcing from the onset his intention to reinvent a war-machine and impose its line"[61]—identifies, if indirectly, a bipolar and ambiguous characteristic in the Palestinian movement consistent with both poles of the war-machine. And though he doesn't explicitly say so, and for all the achievements he recognized in the Palestinian struggle ("the new consciousness," the "ripened tone," "serenity," and "certainty"),[62] it's not hard to follow through on his own conceptual tools to read the Palestinian Revolution as an Aboriginal war-machine that got caught up

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in its own destructive pole in an instrumentalist use of political violence, and that led itself toward its own kind of suicide (let's call it the state-building project). In more pointed terms, we can say that the revolution ultimately activated the camps primarily as bases for an insurrectionist militancy that, while deterritorializing, remained consistent with the logic of state systems and did so in ways that overwhelmed the camps as communal sites of autonomy capable of sundering these spaces from the sovereign grid to create a fundamentally different and asymmetrical type of power. The line of flight, as can always happen, became blocked.

The impasse of territory here was decisive; as much as the extraterritoriality of the camp-communes enabled a "space of absolute freedom," they also constantly pushed the revolution to a kind of pure insurrectionary politics that deferred the social, or what in a different idiom we now call life. Sarhan was neither the first nor the last to recognize this impasse. A few years later, in 1979, Edward Said wrote, in a style unmistakably his own but in similarly spatial terms, of the "genealogy of paradoxically Palestinian presence" set against the very "logic of history and geography" as something "cubistic, all suddenly obtruding planes jutting out into one or another realm";[63] he went on to identify the PLO's absence of "native territory" as "perhaps the tragic flaw in its makeup as a liberation movement of exiles, not mainly of natives fighting their oppressors *in situ*."[64] It was not only that the bourgeois wing of the revolution, under the anti-imperialist imperative of "national independence," took the day and effectively bracketed or deferred social content; it was also the challenge of waging revolution without a territorial place of your own. This meant the revolution posed a very specific extraterritorial contradiction within the regional state system, one that would come to a bloody breaking point first in Jordan in 1970–71, and a few years later, even more brutally and protractedly, in Lebanon. And though the revolution constantly threatened to morph into the kind of bureaucratic statist power it was opposing (something it eventually fully did only under the aegis of the "peace accords"), the contradiction was not, as conventional political common sense still has it, that the PLO, first in Jordan and then in Lebanon, created "a state within a state," but quite the opposite: that it created, at least in part, *an antistate within a state*, its own kind of (long-term) dual power.[65] The commune is but one name we give this sundering of power into qualitative differences.

I don't mean at all to draw a hard line here between insurrection and autonomy, or between what I'm mapping, if only imperfectly, onto the war-machine's creative and destructive poles. It's clear that insurrection, the constant outward movement of force and connection, was the condition of possibility for autonomy.[66] An isolated commune is, after all, a dead commune. The tension in the Palestinian Revolution is in this sense just one version of the paradox of the commune itself: "It must at the same time succeed in giving some consistency to a territorial reality at odds with the 'general order,' and it must give rise to, establish links between, local

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constituencies—that is, it must detach itself from the groundedness that constitutes it."[67] Without the insurrection, there would have been no mass mobilization to "activate" the camps and cities across state lines; Naji ʿAllush, writing in 1973, was correct to identify the unprecedented scale of popular militancy as "an experience in mass action that exceeds anything the region has previously known."[68]

None of this is meant to downplay the plain difficulties and near impossibilities stacked up against the Palestinian Revolution or the enormity of the violent force, in excess of any ethical limits, to which it was subjected. The web of rivalries and state machinations in which it was ensnared was dizzying, and the ensuing, repeated betrayals, crushing; and yes, its territorial vulnerability meant patronizing and bureaucratizing it with money was that much easier; and the near-total ends the Israeli state and its own military apparatus would go to in order to destroy the revolution were lethally effective, culminating in the 1982 siege of Beirut and its pulverization from the air with more than thirty thousand dead and in the carefully timed massacres of civilians (overwhelmingly women and children) in Sabra and Shatila camps. The odds were not only almost impossible; they were, in the full sense of the term, horrific.

In the end, though, we are left with the sense that the revolution too readily succumbed to the temptations of a centralized, top-down insurgency. Ultimately, wrote Faisal Darraj in one of the most scathing internal critiques to date, the gun became the guarantee of the revolution, "both theory and practice with no need of justification outside itself."[69] And, "if the revolution is a gun, the revolutionary is whoever shoots well."[70] The result for Darraj is a deep alienation between people and leadership. In this light, the revolution could not but approach the camp, in its "bundle of intersecting miseries," as anything other than a steady supply of "militants, martyrs, and mothers . . . to be consumed in the road of return to the homeland."[71] A bureaucratized, distant leadership, he wrote, only faced the camp "so that it might incite an alienated consciousness and nurture that alienation so that its own alienation from the camp would remain hidden."[72]

We need not follow Darraj all the way to see that there is something in how a politics overly focused on spectacular insurrection and the intensity of the event might lose sight of the everyday and ordinary experiences, the minor keys of life, that were just as much a part of struggle. Something in how the exaltation of militant action (*al-ʿamal al-fidaʾi*) understood only, or primarily, as the explosively violent act can impede the work of building autonomous spaces of decision making and collective life. Or how images of muscular heroism in popular war can often reduce people to a set of caricatured personas and expendable inputs in a logic that mimics precisely the one being resisted. As Bhandar and Toscano ask, is this not exactly what Jean-Luc Godard realized about the revolutionary image when he opted out of completing his propaganda film about the PLO and turned (with Jean-Pierre Gorin and Anne-Marie Miéville) his project into the much more complicated exercise of

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self-criticism and montage that is *Ici et allieurs* (1976)?[73] This image, in its iconicity and replaceability, not only partook in a revolutionary theatricality that silenced the less spectacular experiences of Palestinian life and struggle, but it also never escaped the spectacular economy of capitalism. Yet part of what I have also been trying to show is that it would be remiss to stop here. For all its faults, the Palestinian Revolution creatively made territory and subjects in ways that have been otherwise deeply underappreciated. And it did so not only under almost impossible conditions but also in ways that continue to pose questions worth thinking about in our present.

Revolution Otherwise

What strikes me in your argument is that it takes the form of "until now." A revolutionary undertaking is directed not only against the present but against the rule of the "until now."
—Michel Foucault, "Revolutionary Action"

If the Palestinian Revolution is armed with a philosophy at all, it is armed with the anti-determinist vision of the open-endedness of the future.
—Fawwaz Turki, "Meaning in Palestinian History"

None of this is to fall into an evaluative mode of judgment. For all its use as judgment, revolution itself arguably resists the success/failure binary. Our modern concept of revolution is not only defined by a set of antinomies (freedom/necessity, distinctly man-made/naturally irresistible, impossible/inevitable, cyclical/ruptural), but, in part because of its persistent identification with older naturalistic senses of repetition, revolution also appears as *both* that in which every victory is also a defeat (since seizures of state power will always, and tragically, reproduce the very same instruments of domination revolution sought to destroy, since Giorgio Agamben's sovereign always comes out on top, however you shuffle the cards[74]), *and,* equally, that in which every defeat is also a victory (in the sense that defeat only establishes the conditions for deeper reenactment that will sweep away not only the ancien régime but also newer counterrevolutionary forces as well, just as Marx's old mole just keeps burrowing).[75] It is of course Reinhart Koselleck who gives us one of the most definitive accounts of this antinomian structure of the modern concept of revolution. But it is likewise Koselleck who, in reckoning with the concept as a force field that might outstrip even the modernity that was its condition, fails to fully secure it to any final content and leaves the door ajar for its reconfiguration in new spaces of experience.[76] Instead of *evaluating* the history of the Palestinian Revolution, then, how can we read it through the present of our own revolutionary perspective? Or, put differently, and to borrow from Massimiliano Tomba again, can we read it from the perspective of the field of possible experiences it opens up in the present?[77]

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On the eve of the Israeli siege of Beirut and arguably at the beginning of the end for the Palestinian Revolution, Arafat was asked about the revolution's gains: What had it achieved? His reply (from the same interview Deleuze cited in his conversation with Sanbar) was to point to a change in consciousness: "We have turned our people from a refugee people waiting in queues for charity and alms from UNRWA into a people fighting for freedom."[78] To his credit, he escapes a certain ossified, closed conceptualization of revolution as nothing less than the transition from one sovereign regime to another. Perhaps out of sheer necessity (since nothing even remotely close was on the horizon), revolution here is wrenched away from its eighteenth-century republican grid of intelligibility and understood not strictly as the achievement of a self-determining new regime, but instead as an open, collective process the effect of which is the transformation of a body politic (turning waiting refugees into fighting militants). That is, revolution appears here not as the capture of the state but as the formation of revolutionary subjects. As much as Arafat and his contemporaries desired the normalization of the Palestinian nation into the forward-moving, progressive line of universal history, the fact remains that the Palestinian movement belongs less to any revolutionary age and more to the (ageless?) experiences of revolt; put differently, it had more to do with the interruption rather than reproduction of universal history. No greater testament to this can be found than the fact that Palestine not only remains excluded from the "family of nations"; it remains excluded from the halls of revolution itself.

This kind of exclusion is possible in no small part because revolution as a concept continues to operate less as a living concept and more as a static classificatory measure: not just, as Michel Foucault once put it, as "a gigantic effort to domesticate revolts within a rational and controllable history"[79] but also, conversely in its exclusivity, as a means of provincializing those forms of collective action that don't play out as a desire for state capture. Ariella Azoulay writes that the study of revolution is still contained within the epistemological and political norms of the regimes produced by eighteenth-century revolutions.[80] As such, revolutions are understood as occurrences in which masses take part in radical regime change. Collective politics, or what Azoulay calls "forms of being-together" that don't reproduce this means-end logic, don't merit the term *revolution*. The result is that the concept has become a *touchstone*; instead of asking "What is revolution today?," it offers itself to use as judgment—"this is revolution" or "this is not revolution." The more frequent negative judgment—"this is not revolution"—ends up preserving the (fossilized and inflexible) concept of revolution as an idea shielded from phenomena that might disturb it. A preservation with clearly guarded and racialized borders: Hungary in 1956 is a revolution, but Algeria is a war, Haiti a rebellion, the struggle for civil rights in the United States a movement, and so on.[81]

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And yet Palestinian activists, like many before and after them, refused to be siphoned off into the obscurity of the colonial and postcolonial world's litany of revolts, insurrections, insurgencies, and so on: those illegitimate children of revolution seen as more descriptively suitable for the politics of the colonial peripheries and that mark, as Étienne Balibar shows, the very Eurocentricity of the term *revolution* as the reserve of "citizens" in liberal nation-states.[82] Instead, Palestinians insisted on and incited their own revolutionary-ness and their continuity with what they saw as the global and anti-imperial heritage of revolution. This poses its own conceptual-political problem: Again, what is a revolution that neither overthrows a state structure nor institutes a lasting one of its own? A failed revolution? An unrevolutionary revolution? Can we argue instead that what was revolutionary about the Palestinian experience cannot be apprehended in the ossified term of *revolution*?

If we move away from revolution as touchstone, we can begin to think through the concept in terms closer to what Foucault saw and admired in Iran (but which he himself was careful *not* to call a revolution, despite the fact that it ended in that most "revolutionary" of artifices—the republic). That is, we can think of revolution not as the progressive unfolding of absolute history, but as the digressive reformulation of politics that occurs when, as Foucault has it, "a singularity revolts" but demands or creates something not reducible to the evolutionary march of the liberal idea. If, as Arendt once lamented, "theoretically, the most far-reaching consequence of the French Revolution was the birth of the modern concept of history in Hegel's philosophy,"[83] Foucault's intervention was to read the Iranian Revolution as an event in the very dissolution of that concept—the historical collapse of history (or, at least the collapse of the laws of necessity and dialectical movement that sat atop the entire edifice of universal history—and here he would have found a willing ally in Arendt). Is this not in part what Foucault means when he says, "Revolts belong to history. But, in a certain way, they escape from it"?[84] Doesn't he mean not only that revolts are singular and not part of a predetermined, grand narrative but that they are also, nonetheless, perhaps even more, historical. Or, in other words, for Foucault, revolutionary Iran was at once "an *inclusion* (in making history) and an *exit* (from terminal history)."[85]

What Foucault saw in Iran (even if he did not quite parse it in these terms—and here the task is to read Foucault contra Foucault to an extent) was a revolution that escaped the laws and quasi science of revolution.[86] But this, I would insist, requires a total shift away from the state as the object and end (let alone, truth) of revolutionary desire. And so Foucault talks about a revolt in which, in the face of mortal risk, an irreducible political will—"I will not obey"—produces not a familiar schemata of transition but, at least primarily, novel subjectivities. Revolt is "how subjectivity (not of great men, but that of anyone) is brought into history, *breathing life into it*";[87] who ends up governing is of much less significance.

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In this sense, anticolonial revolution might be thought of not just as the end of the dissymmetry (revolution here, revolt there), not just, as in Balibar's felicitous turn of phrase, as the movement of Europe from the subject to the object of revolution (this, too, Balibar warns, might be understood just as the universalization of Europe's political categories).[88] It is also, arguably, about the re- or de-formation of revolution toward a different historical meaning and effectiveness; it is already the start of a different content that travels under the name and sign of "revolution." For Fanon, that anticolonial revolution could only be a digressive break with the European past of the concept is made clear in those unforgettable final pages of *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he directly addresses his revolutionary accomplices: "Come, comrades, the European game is finally over, we must look for something else. We can do anything today provided we do not ape Europe, provided we are not obsessed with catching up with Europe."[89] And while his supremely modernist moment of the constitution of a "new man" relied nonetheless on the very premises of the humanism it sought to surpass, it involved a firm rejection of any revolutionary paradigm that sought an emulation of existing political models in a progressive unfolding of history: "So, comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions, and societies that draw their inspiration from it. Humanity expects other things from us than this grotesque and generally obscene emulation."[90]

Some (Foucault included) might counter that the collapse of this philosophy of history necessarily moves us beyond revolution per se, beyond the privileging of the proletariat as *the* historical subject, beyond the great binaries of the class antagonism, beyond the seemingly necessary entwinement of revolution with war, and onto the open plane of insurrectional politics. But this would be to miss the potential these events have (regardless of their terminus or not in conventional state forms) for opening up different experiences of novelty, break, freedom, or equality that we still might want to call "revolutionary"; it denies the capacity of revolting subjects to change the content of the concept of revolution.

Nonetheless, both Fanon and Foucault help us shift our political analytic when thinking about revolutionary forms of collective action away from stolid schemas for capturing the state toward an appreciation of the singularity of revolutionary events as moments of subject formation. And as such, they help us move away from the grammar of defeat and failure. "They say revolutions turn out badly," Deleuze says. "But they're constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people's revolutionary becoming."[91] It's in this light that one can argue that the historical production of a collective subjectivity in its camp-communes was the enduring effect of what we know and insist on—in an openly performative sense—as the Palestinian Revolution. "There was not a Palestinian alive between the battle of Karamah in 1968 and the siege of Beirut in 1982," writes Fawwaz Turki, "who was not radically transformed at the core."[92] *This* is the revolution's achievement.

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And yet it is also its limit. For as much as the revolution fashioned new subjects, it also struggled with the kind of transformation of the social structure and space that we would rightly (following everyone from Marx to Arendt) associate, for better or worse, with the modern concept of revolution. How, then, does one think Turki's radical "transformation at the core" alongside Sarhan's failure of "intentional social change"? What kind of revolutionary subject is constituted when "social change" is bracketed in the immediacy of militant action? While it's true that the Palestinian Revolution failed to push its communes further into a durably different form of social reproduction, it nonetheless grappled with territory and space in ways that demonstrated a keen awareness of their relationship to subjectivity or consciousness. If anything, Sarhan's account shows that the revolution understood that there is no Archimedean point of politics outside of space. Politics is not some abstract dimension of positions and discourses, and nor is space an empty, uniform, and measurable expanse; politics is essentially spatial, and space is never neutral.[93] What Sarhan effectively shows us is that the revolutionary subject was not the effect of consciousness or pedagogy per se but of bodily practice, training, fighting, arming, and of debating, filming, documenting, inhabiting, building, cooking, sharing, affecting, and narrating. It was the camp-communes themselves—as the dense fabric of bonds between these spatial practices—that were the constitutive forces in his account.

This is, in short, the power of the commune as a political event; it is both the means and the end. "The commune," Joshua Clover tells us, "is a tactic that is also a form of life."[94] What the Palestinian "camps under the revolution" *demonstrated*, as all communes worthy of the name do, was a different way of inhabiting territory, what we can call a different politics of inhabitation. And it's precisely the *style* of territorial inhabitation—as demonstrative and substantive, as both struggle and social reproduction, as both politics and life—that is at stake. "The territory is to the commune what the word is to the meaning—that is, never just a means."[95] But, as an end in itself, the commune is not about self-definition but demonstration: "What it means to show by materializing is not its identity, not the idea it has of itself, but the idea it has of life."[96] The Paris Commune's greatest achievement, Marx once wrote, "was its own working existence."[97]

There is here a certain affinity between the commune and anticolonial/ Indigenous politics,[98] an affinity located not only in the centrality of the land question (and by extension dispossession) but also, relatedly, in the relationship to temporality. Bruno Bosteels, who traces an entire nonstatist revolutionary tradition in Mexico around the figure of the commune—one that he posits productively changes the concept of revolution—tells us that the commune should be read according to the temporal logic of the future anterior: "The past of the commune still lies ahead of us, or, put the other way around, the forward movement of the commune requires a return

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FIGURE 2. “The land is for the hands that liberate it.” ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Muzayyin, PLO Unified Information (1980). Source: The Palestine Project Archive.

to the future.”[99] It necessarily involves, he writes, a loop or short circuit between pre- and postcapitalist references. In this sense, the communal and the anticolonial share a distinctly demonstrative or *prefigurative* politics that is always already here and yet to come, a politics that “comes to be produced as something that *will have been*.”[100]

For Palestinian anticolonialism, this demonstrative idea could not but confront the dispossession that was its formative event. The camp-communes were a means to the liberation of land and eventual return, but they were also temporary demonstrations of what such a liberation and its subjects might look like. Spatially organized around villages of origin but activated for outward political movement, the camps connected the vanquished geography of Palestine *before* conquest and settlement with the potential forms of association and inhabitation of a Palestine *after* decolonization. In their very territorial form, they connected the historical memory of a past with the demonstration of a future. And as such, they gestured toward the prospect of a future “return” to an unalienated relation to land; hence the connection in this revolutionary imagery between working the land and liberating it (fig. 2).

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If today the figure of the commune has hurtled back into political theory and imaginaries, this is not just because schemas of large-scale transition appear so blocked. It's also because, to add to the weakness of organized labor, the insurrectionary forms of blockade and occupation that so defined the last decade—our so-called movement of the squares, signaled most emphatically by the name "Tahrir"—themselves seem mired in a kind of fatal cycle of reenactment. For all the sublimity and real force of revolting crowds, the common consensus is that *as* insurrections they all largely failed to really disrupt economic infrastructures, decisively overrun political apparatuses, or split armed forces.[101] Even if our insurrectionists were actually interested in taking over state power—and they appear on the whole not to be—they seem unable to get beyond its coercive edges. And so, this so-called era of riots (the paradigmatic political form of the age of circulation) exposes itself anew to the somewhat trite charge of "revolt without revolution": a charge that came even from corners previously apprehensive about classical conceptions of revolution, with the Invisible Committee—whose 2009 work *The Coming Insurrection* retrospectively appeared less like an essay and more like a prophesy—reading the historical moment they had anticipated in quite orthodox terms and glumly concluding, "The insurrections have come, but not the revolution."[102] Adding a little later that "the revolution always seems to choke off at the riot stage."[103] The figure of the commune returns, then, as an escape hatch. Its appeal remains no doubt partly in its existence as an emancipatory political form removed from the teleological end of state takeover.[104] *But* it also mitigates the weakness of insurrection itself; it furnishes the revolutionary perspective with an exit from the seeming dead end of the square—from the "wreck of the plaza"[105]—toward the more prosaic but durable spaces of mutual aid, solidarity, association, and assembly.

It's here, in this disjuncture, that an engagement with the Palestinian experience can productively, if only partially, refract the stakes. Reading the Palestinian camp-communes from this present—a present of impasse as much as movement—not only helps us dislocate imaginaries of the commune from their usual mooring in debates of the European and French ultra-left, and locate them in a wider anticolonial history, alongside ongoing histories of native land reclamation in Anglophone settler colonies, or the long history of revolutionary communes in Mexico and Venezuela. It also helps us reconceive revolution; it helps us trace the lineaments of a revolutionary tradition that in its experimentation with a militant, antistatist autonomy pushes revolution well beyond its usual preoccupations.

If the anticolonial tradition centers dispossession as the ongoing (and not simply originary) condition of possibility for capitalism everywhere, this history poses the question of what happens to communization when it faces the questions of land and association as inseparable from the presentness of dispossession. What does

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a revolutionary perspective look like when it not only lets go of schemas of state capture and progressive historical movement but also stakes its territorial autonomy on a reckoning with the unfinished pasts of colonial history? What would a revolutionary perspective look like today if it were, in Said's words, "set against the very logic of history and geography"?[106] This is another way of asking what an insistence on decolonization as an *ongoing* historical imperative might do to the wider revolutionary perspective, not as an exercise in nostalgia but precisely as a way of thinking futurity. If "decolonization" was once another term for revolution, this was not only because it involved the complete overthrow of institutions and ruling ideas, "an agenda of total disorder";[107] it was also because decolonization was, as Achille Mbembe writes, channeling Amílcar Cabral, "a promise whose main mode of existence was its futurity."[108]

The questions of the Palestinian Revolution are not the questions of our own global conjuncture; they're not even exactly the questions of the Palestinian present. And yet to make autonomous territory while entirely surrounded, to fashion a collective from those rendered surplus to formal production and without the structures of stable waged life, to buck the very current of dominant history, to insist on the future as a reckoning with what has been rendered past—all of this resonates across the sharp differences in context. It borders on the banal to point out the recursive endurance of forms of colonial history at the heart of our insurrectionary present, in everything from dispossessive accumulation to anti-Black violence, to the entwinement of police and war, to our climate-cum-border crisis. If the global as a scale has any descriptive coherence, it's in the operations of a capitalism that remains colonial in its very form. If it is to live up to its radical promise, the revolutionary perspective today, then, cannot but rise to face the contemporary iterations of *our* colonial question. A question, this time, only more catastrophic in scope. There may be no direct lessons here; the Palestinian liberation movement may be too far from us now, but to be revolutionary today is increasingly to learn how to adopt the stance of "undefeated despair."

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Notes

1. I use the term *Palestinian Revolution* (*al-Thawra al-Filastiniyya*) in the way its protagonists would have used it in the 1960s and 1970s to refer to the insurgent liberation movement that came to be unified under the organizational umbrella of the Palestine Liberation

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Organization (PLO), and perceived itself as part of a broader tricontinental anticolonial tradition. I take the historical span of this revolution to be roughly from the official start of armed struggle in 1965, through the mass mobilizations of the 1970s, to the defeat of the PLO in Lebanon and its forced withdrawal to Tunisia in 1982 (though more official historiography might mark the end with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993). That an explanatory footnote of this kind is necessary (what or when exactly was the Palestinian Revolution, and why was it a revolution?) speaks to one of the main argumentative threads in this essay—namely, that we need to rethink what qualifies as a revolution, or better still, to rethink the use of revolution as a qualificatory judgment.

2. I mean *bantustan* here in the generic sense: as the name of a colonially administered set of racially segregated, fragmented enclaves with minimal administrative authority but no political sovereignty and lacking popular legitimacy. The use of the term in the Palestinian context, and its analogical reference to South African apartheid, has been around for some time; see Farsakh, "Independence, Cantons, or Bantustans."
3. Berger, "Undefeated Despair."
4. *Pessoptimism*, which has come to name a certain way of being Palestinian in the world, is drawn from the title of Emile Habiby's seminal tragicomic novel, *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist* (1974).
5. Althusser, *Reproduction of Capitalism*, 75. Insofar as the state is the guarantor of the reproduction of capitalism, Althusser wrote, "A social revolution consists in dispossessing the dominant class of state power . . . and establishing new relations of production, the reproduction of which is ensured by the destruction of the old state apparatuses and the (long and difficult) construction of new ones" (*Reproduction of Capitalism*, 150).
6. Arendt, "Thoughts."
7. Though, as Alberto Toscano points out in one of a set of articles on the transition problematic, this assessment, if anything, shows revolutionary transition to be a much deeper (and less centralized) problem than state capture or the smashing of the state's repressive apparatus. Toscano, "Transition Deprogrammed."
8. Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?"
9. Tomba, *Insurgent Universality*. Marx himself in his later writings offered readings of revolution captured neither by the teleology of universal history nor the modern state form. Uncoincidentally, it was the experience of the Paris Commune that complicated matters for Marx; this was an experience that demonstrated both the infeasibility of simple state capture and the necessity of a revolution that would fashion entirely new political forms. As Lenin, among others, noted, the one amendment Marx made to the *Communist Manifesto* was spurred by the commune. In the 1872 preface to the German edition, Marx wrote that the practical experience of the commune, "where the proletariat for the first time held political power," had rendered parts of the program "antiquated," for it had become clear that "the working class cannot take hold of the ready-made state apparatus and wield [it] for its own purposes" (Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 21). See also Lenin, *State and Revolution*; Blackburn, "Marxism." Nonetheless, this insight around a new political form was folded back into a figure of the state a little too easily, not least by Lenin himself in *State and Revolution*, where it appears as a "proletarian state," or what he calls elsewhere and more suggestively, this time in comments on the Soviets in the buildup to the October Revolution, "the commune-state."
10. Ross, *Communal Luxury*, 2.

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11. Weber, “Bare Life,” 9.
12. *Al-Hadaf*, the weekly magazine of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), was cofounded and edited by Kanafani from 1969 until his assassination in 1972.
13. Kanafani, “al-Mukhayyamat,” 2.
14. The ANM was established in the summer of 1951 by a number of student and activist groups, many centered on the American University in Beirut (AUB) but also including members from the recently disbanded Arab Fedayin group from Damascus and those from an AUB-based cultural circle called “al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqa” (“The Strong Bond”—after a journal established by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad ʿAbduh, a name that only underscored the developmental emphasis on renewal or rebirth that marked this strand of Arab nationalism).
15. Baumgarten, *Min al-Tahrir*, 113.
16. UNRWA, “Interim Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East,” A/1451/Rev.1, October 6, 1950.
17. Badir, “*al-Hadaf* tashhad,” 5.
18. Badir, “*al-Hadaf* tashhad,” 5.
19. Badir, “*al-Hadaf* tashhad,” 5.
20. Badir, “*al-Hadaf* tashhad,” 5.
21. *al-Hadaf*, “al-Mukhayyamat fi Libnan.”
22. For a careful parsing of the organizational and factional tensions around the question of the primacy of armed struggle in the revolutionary movement, see Giacaman, “Political Representation.”
23. Khalaf, “Resistance,” 53. Fatah (a reverse acronym in Arabic for the Palestinian National Liberation Movement) was and remains the largest party in the PLO.
24. Khalaf, “Resistance,” 66–67.
25. Khalaf, “Resistance,” 67.
26. Khalaf, “Resistance,” 68.
27. Khalaf, “Resistance,” 69.
28. Qaddumi, “Conversation,” 105.
29. I draw here from a shorter reading of Sarhan’s article in Abourahme, “Nothing to Lose.”
30. Sarhan, “al-Mukhayyam al-Filastini,” 434.
31. Sarhan, “al-Mukhayyam al-Filastini,” 435.
32. Sarhan, “al-Mukhayyam al-Filastini,” 435.
33. *al-Hadaf*, “Durus min Kumyunit Paris,” 2.
34. Sarhan, “al-Mukhayyam al-Filastini,” 436.
35. Sarhan, “al-Mukhayyam al-Filastini,” 437.
36. Sarhan, “al-Mukhayyam al-Filastini,” 435.
37. Sarhan, “al-Mukhayyam al-Filastini,” 435.
38. Sarhan, “al-Mukhayyam al-Filastini,” 439.
39. ʿAllush, “Harakit al-tahrir al-watani al-Filastini.”
40. Sarhan, “al-Mukhayyam al-Filastini,” 438.
41. Sarhan, “al-Mukhayyam al-Filastini,”439.
42. Sarhan, “al-Mukhayyam al-Filastini,” 440.
43. The Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of revolution and its wider implications for political thought and practice have long been the stuff of stark debate, and the various conceptual tensions with Marxist and post-Marxist thought are by now fairly well trodden (becoming

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vs. dialectics, desire vs. will, provisionality vs. unity, and so on), though there are of course a number of points of productive synthesis (not least in the work of Antonio Negri). My interest here in turning to Deleuze and Guattari is primarily analytic; it is to read the tensions in the Palestinian movement though the figure of the war-machine that it helped inspire. Ultimately, what I want to do with the concept of revolution doesn't really rely on the abstract declensions of revolutionary struggle we get in *A Thousand Plateaus*; having said that, I do take something from the concept of becoming as a critique of identity and linearity (that is, as a way of thinking past the self-constitution of the true and essential identity of a collective subject as the end of revolutionary struggle) and don't see this as necessarily incompatible with the best of the anticolonial tradition, which has often carried its own antiessentialism, including, most compellingly for me, in the work of Frantz Fanon.

44. Deleuze and Sanbar, "The Indians of Palestine," 26.
45. Deleuze, "Grandeur," 32
46. Deleuze and Sanbar, "The Indians of Palestine," 27.
47. Much like Foucault's engagement with Iran, Deleuze's writings on Palestine have not only been largely neglected but also often subject to censure. (Even Gregg Lambert, who productively engages with them, does so from an unmistakably liberal standing that is openly dismissive of the anticolonial parsing of types of violence implicit in Deleuze's engagement.) Symptomatically speaking, it is precisely this disrepute that marks their disruptive force. The best corrective to the willful misreadings of Foucault on the Iranian Revolution is by far Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi's *Foucault in Iran*. For a recent article that considers Deleuze on Palestine, see Medien, "Palestine in Deleuze," though the article doesn't grapple with how this engagement shaped Deleuze's larger body of work. It is worth noting that Deleuze elsewhere credited Sanbar as being one of the main influences in his turn to politics after 1968: "I, for my own part, made a sort of move into politics around May 68, as I came into contact with specific problems, through Guattari, through Foucault, through [Elias Sanbar]" (Deleuze and Negri, "Control and Becoming").
48. Lambert, "War-Machine."
49. Clastres's work was a key departure point for the "Treatise," but Deleuze and Guattari make clear their intent to go past what they see as its dead end. Having reversed the principal proposition of (Hobbesian) natural law (it is not the state that is against war but war that is against the state), and having shown that it is neither the development of productive forces nor the differentiation of political forces that explain the rise of the state (a rise that is not an evolution but a sudden mutation), Clastres, they charge, was never really able to solve the question of why the state triumphed: "The more deeply Clastres delved into the problem, the more he seemed to deprive himself of the means of resolving it" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 359). In the end, he took the independence of segmentary primitive societies literally, and by making their formal exteriority a real independence "he remained an evolutionist and posited a state of nature" (359). Here they seem to be saying that there is no priorness to "primitive societies" (though the question of the origin of war, which is not a natural phenomenon, remains unclear in the text). War-machines and the state are not self-sufficient entities; they have always belonged to the "same field." The question is about coexistence in a "perpetual field of interaction"; the state not only has always been in a relation with an outside but is inconceivable without that relationship. "The state is sovereignty. But sovereignty only reigns over what it is capable of internalizing and appropriating locally" (360).

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50. Is not the affirmative but often anxious image of the "American Indian" or "Red Indian" among Palestinian revolutionaries (Arafat, Sanbar, but also notably Muʿin Bsaysu, and, in much more sophisticated terms, Mahmud Darwish), a testament at once to an identification and to a rejection of complete identification with this image, not only a misapprehension of the "success" of the North American settler project but also an implicit acceptance of precisely this seeming inevitability?
51. Lambert, "War-Machine."
52. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 419.
53. Marzec, "War-Machine."
54. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 417.
55. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 422. And here, in some of the most prescient and startling lines of the treatise, written decades before the war on terror, they write that this culminates in a final reverse appropriation, with the state becoming no more than the means adapted to a worldwide war-machine bent on total war; a postfascist figure "that takes peace as its object directly, as the peace of Terror or Survival" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 421). This is a peace more terrifying than total war.
56. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 420.
57. The notion of the "nonbattle," understood in Deleuze and Guattari's register as being about vortical speed and movement, is the stuff of counterattack, "expressing the speed of a flash attack, and the counterspeed of an immediate response" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 416).
58. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 423.
59. Deleuze and Negri, "Control and Becoming."
60. Deleuze, "Grandeur," 32.
61. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 354.
62. Deleuze and Sanbar, "The Indians of Palestine," 25.
63. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 123.
64. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 134.
65. For readings of dual power that exceed the Leninist terms of the concept as a strictly transitional and impossibly unstable phase, see Bosteels, "State or Commune," on the Mexican Revolution, and Toscano, "Dual Power Revisited," on Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.
66. The Research and Destroy collective summed up the necessary entwinement of insurrection and autonomy in the context of the Occupy movement as follows:

    > What we learn is that the more these spaces withdraw from confrontation with the antagonistic forces surrounding them, the less they are able to open up spaces of difference with them, and the uglier and more terrible become the new forms of community they create. Conversely, the more the camps fight the surrounding police-world, the more they become actually liberated zones, rather than simulacra of liberation. (Research and Destroy, "The Wreck of the Plaza")

    In different terms, and even more recently, when one centrally involved activist reflected on the Venezuelan communes precisely as a combination of local self-determination and outward force, he described them in paradoxical terms as a "government of popular insurgency" (Ciccariello-Maher, *Building the Commune*, 45).
67. Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 205.
68. ʿAllush, "Harakit al-tahrir al-watani al-Filastini," 17.
69. Darraj, *Buʾs al-Thaqafa*, 14.
70. Darraj, *Buʾs al-Thaqafa*, 16.

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71. Darraj, *Bu's al-Thaqafa*, 17.
72. Darraj, *Bu's al-Thaqafa*, 17.
73. Bhandar and Toscano, "Representing Palestinian Dispossession."
74. Agamben concludes his introduction to *Homo Sacer* by charging Marxist conceptions of the state with missing the question of sovereignty; this historical absence, he claims, has trapped twentieth-century socialist revolutions in their own self-defeating identification: "But one ends up identifying with an enemy whose structure one does not understand, and the theory of the State (and in particular of the state of exception, which is to say, of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the transitional phase leading to the stateless society) is the reef on which the revolutions of our century have been shipwrecked" (12).
75. Marx's reading of the 1848 revolutions found in their very defeat the approaching victory of revolutionary forces. That is, he found in these events the "permanent revolution" that not only survives but is strengthened by setbacks along the way that clarify the composition of enemies and accelerate the reckoning; his writing in these sections of the *Eighteenth Brumaire* even shifts tense abruptly between past, present, and future. To this reading he gave the image of the burrowing mole, who descends deeper into the subterranean realm only to reappear at the surface when its "preparatory work" is done, so that "the whole of Europe will jump and cry: Well grubbed, old mole!" (*Eighteenth Brumaire*, 98).
76. Koselleck, *Futures Past*.
77. Tomba, *Insurgent Universality*.
78. Arafat, "Discussion," 6.
79. Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?," 450.
80. Azoulay, "Revolution."
81. Azoulay, "Revolution."
82. Balibar, "The Idea of Revolution."
83. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 45.
84. Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?," 449.
85. Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran*, 3.
86. Foucault maintained a consistent ambivalence toward the concept of revolution, at times affirmative ("In my opinion, the role of the intellectual today must be to re-establish the same status of desirability for the image of revolution that existed in the 19th century" [quoted in Kelly, "Revolution," 440]), at other times deeply apprehensive ("I prefer the question of Horkheimer: 'But is this revolution really such a desirable thing?'" [450]). Mark Kelly brings these together to conclude, "The compatibility of his pro-revolutionary attitude with his critique of revolution can be seen in these remarks: Foucault wants revolution only on condition that it can be a new kind of revolution, different from what has gone before" (440). In his book on Foucault, John Rajchman locates revolution at the center of what he calls "Foucault's dilemma," but arrives at a different conclusion, writing that Foucault ultimately adopts a "post-revolutionary stance," and that he "may be the philosopher of freedom in a post-revolutionary time" (*Michel Foucault*, 51).
87. Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?," 452; emphasis added.
88. Balibar, "The Idea of Revolution."
89. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 236.
90. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 239.
91. Deleuze and Negri, "Control and Becoming."
92. Turki, *Soul in Exile*, 7.

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93. Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 201.
94. Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot*, 191.
95. Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 203.
96. Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 204.
97. Marx, *Civil War in France*, 65.
98. It is telling, for one thing, that in the chapter in *To Our Friends* that has been described as their love letter to the commune, the Invisible Committee keeps reaching for examples from Indigenous anticolonial struggles.
99. Bosteels, "State or Commune," 578.
100. Bosteels, "State or Commune," 578.
101. Smith, "Since the End."
102. Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 12.
103. Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 12
104. Bosteels, "State or Commune," 571.
105. Research and Destroy, "The Wreck of the Plaza."
106. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 123
107. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 2.
108. Mbembe, *Dark Night*, 43.

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