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In the Present Tense: Diary of the Days to Come

ANDREA LUKA ZIMMERMAN

To enjoy
fireworks
you would have
to have lived
a different kind
of life.
— Naomi Shihab Nye

My friend Khaldoon is a clinical psychiatrist. When he hears about my residency in Palestine, named for John Berger's work and example, he offers his time, encouraging me to email if I need advice or if I'd like to talk anything through. We start a year-long correspondence:

> By the way, you might know that before the term *psychiatry* was coined, doctors who treated the "insane" were called "alienists." You have to turn people into "others" to subject them to force. And I'm sure there is a parallel there in Palestine. And, of course, in colonialism. It's so interesting, the story of the British in India. When they first went there, they were prone to "go native," convert to local religions, and marry. But as the colonial

> project progressed, a Victorian and racist distance emerged, which I'm sure allowed abuses to proceed.

Slowly, I have been learning to read Arabic. I love how the opening lines of traditional Arab folktales, كان ولم يكن (Kan walam yakun), tell us "It was and it was not." The narrative is somehow true and untrue at the same time.

Berger, in *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, writes:

> Poems, even when narrative, do not resemble stories. All stories are about battles, of one kind or another, which end in victory or defeat. Everything moves towards the end, when the outcome will be known.
>
> Poems, regardless of any outcome, cross the battlefields, tending the wounded, listening to the wild monologues of the triumphant or the fearful. They bring a kind of peace. Not by anaesthesia or easy reassurance, but by recognition and the promise that what has been experienced cannot disappear as if it had never been. Yet the promise is not of a monument. (Who, still on a battlefield, wants monuments?) The promise is that language has acknowledged, has given shelter, to the experience which demanded, which cried out.

The 218 bus to East Jerusalem stops at Qalandia checkpoint, and everyone must disembark. I don't know what to do. I hear "من هنا" (min huna, "from here"). We passengers vary in age; some are elders. In a long line, we climb flights of stairs, those struggling to do so slowing down those rushing or wishing to get back home sooner. In silence we pass along the elevated footbridge. From all angles, CCTV cameras point at our faces. Where I live, London, is among the most intensely surveilled places in Europe. In London, nearly two decades ago, one could request the footage of oneself captured by such cameras, with the faces of others blotted out for legal reasons. My friend Manu made a film from this, with herself traversing London among headless citizens, called *Faceless*. Yet that was nothing compared to this. We descend a piss-stinking exit route via a turnstile.

I found Abu Hassan through the work of Penny Johnson, an author and researcher who has spent nearly forty years in the Occupied Territories of Palestine where she studies the experiences of animals in conflict zones. Abu Hassan is a hyena who was caught in a hunter's trap and, because of the subsequent amputation of his foot, became a resident of Qalqilya Zoo. Hassan can be both a first name and a surname. The name حسَّان means *doer of good* or *benefactor*. I always like it when animals have the names of people.

He looks at the wall. I look at the wall. We investigate the air, occasionally looking at each other from the very edges of our eyes. I try to slow down my breathing and relax my body, especially my heart, which pounds when thinking of his bone-crunching jaws. Then I feel him staring at me directly. I stare back, prepared to divert my eyes so as not to be provocative, but instead, the gentlest gaze greets me. I look into Abu Hassan's eyes for what feels like half

an hour. It is more like five minutes. It is said in folklore that hyenas gaze deeply into their prey's eyes in order to hypnotize them. I feel, rather, the desire to connect. Thinking about a different animal, John Berger, in his "Ten Dispatches about Place," writes: "In our exchanges, such as they are, in the midday company we offer one another, there is a substratum of what I can only describe as gratitude."

Striped hyenas are actually quite timid, and one of their peculiarities is their habit of feigning death when attacked. I know the danger of comparing behaviour across species, yet survival mechanisms may touch us in unexpected ways.

My friend Erica says she would never fight back if attacked by people.

How can you know this is how it will be? Or is it how you *intend* to act?

She insists, *This is how it will be!*

Vultures don't kill. Eagles and goshawks do, and people love all those killer animals like leopards and lions.

I leave my house at sunrise to film the street dogs. Some are relaxed around me now, grown used to my presence in the area, and I can capture them on camera easily. Nusra rehomed one that was injured and is training it to meet children at schools.

Abdallah and I see a fox.

I see a beautiful small bird, and when I show the picture to Samah, she tells me it's a Palestinian sunbird, طائر الشمس فلسطيني.

I nearly stumble over a tortoise at 'Ayn Fit.

I wake from a dream with a strong sense of being inside my dog Ella's skin. She wrapped her fur around me. Our connection was so deep. When I had first seen her at the rescue centre, something compelled me to approach her. I stuck my finger through the mesh of her cage. She never let me out of her sight. In all the years we shared, only in those moments when she slept did her gaze fall away. Then the phone call from Gareth; I know immediately it is about Ella. I know it because she visited my dream. That I can't be there at her last moment breaks me up. I should be holding her.

Animals at the zoo are divided into different categories. Mustafa is responsible for the most dangerous, a.k.a. the meat eaters, those creatures who must be closely guarded, who exist behind the highest walls. Animals in enclosed spaces lend themselves to easy metaphors, don't they? Penny Johnson collected many for the hyena, and here are three:

> Once I tried to sit
> On one of the vacant seats of hope
> But the word "reserved"
> Squatted there like a hyena.
>
> — Najwan Darwish

> "Wolves and Hyenas Hunt Together, Prove Middle East Peace Is Possible" (*Washington Post* headline from 2016)

> When Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, writer

> and politician Horace Walpole called her a "hyena in petticoats."

There are no wild animals in Qalqilya, Mustafa says.

I think of Jean Genet's *Prisoner of Love*, where he writes that

> The hour between dog and wolf, that is, dusk, when the two can't be distinguished from each other, suggests a lot of other things besides the time of day . . . The hour in which . . . every being becomes his own shadow, and thus something other than himself. The hour of metamorphoses, when people half hope, half fear that a dog will become a wolf. The hour that comes down to us from at least as far back as the early Middle Ages, when country people believed that transformation might happen at any moment.

Dotted around the West Bank, mainly in Area C, are large signs that feature howling wolves with Hebrew letters indicating illegal Israeli settlements.[1]

Furthermore:

> *Red Wolf* is a facial recognition system that surreptitiously scans and stores biometric information and tracks movement, used at checkpoints, especially around Hebron.
>
> *Wolf Pack* is the vast facial database with all available personal information collected by Israel on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.
>
> *Blue Wolf* is an earlier photo database for facial recognition of Palestinians, notably used in raids.
>
> *White Wolf* is a security package and an app used by settlers to check whether Palestinian workers have the correct permits.

Shuruq says that in Palestine the ABC is not an alphabet. I say I think it is an alphabet of horrors.[2] When we first met, I asked her, Why does your surname mean war?

She tells me

> We Palestinians live in a zoo, technologically surveilled, data-mined, watched by CCTV, drones. Both kinds of zoo exist in order to produce knowledge. For example, a person here knows more about a zebra than about native birds. Our zoo is malnourished. Who can afford to have a zoo? Only those who are free can afford to have a zoo. We have a zoo with exotic animals, but we cannot feed them.

Many animals died in Qalqilya Zoo because of the blockade and the last intifada; some were literally frightened to death by the explosions. She continues,

> The zoo is not real life. A zoo must never be a metaphor. It is just what it is. Palestinians must never be a metaphor either. Isn't it ironic that the only zoo in the West Bank is in a village surrounded by the wall?

I grew up in a country, Germany, with a separation wall. Thousands of weapons, land mines, attack

dogs, and armed border guards killed or maimed those attempting to cross. Perhaps this was where my dream of a borderless future began.

I can't remember when I first noticed that, for some people, a readiness to tell strangers how to behave comes naturally. *Don't bring a dog like yours to this park*, they'd say, meaning my dog Ella, their eyes scanning up and down the full length of my body. One should walk away from anyone looking in this manner. On the news you can see politicians do it to journalists to unnerve them. When I was younger, we would label the men doing it to us *breastarians*. Some could not stop themselves. The risk was that if you did the same back to them, it was seen as an invitation.

And there is micropolicing more generally: don't do this, don't do that. In Germany, when strolling around, one is required to stop at red traffic lights, even when there is no car in sight. If you cross and the police are watching, you get fined. In Canada, in the woods near Vancouver, there are whole areas with prescribed directions for where to walk and cycle through what looks like a massive forest. And if you happen to venture the opposite way, someone passing may shout with utter earnestness, *Wrong direction*. How readily people volunteer to serve these given models. I have become alert to the possibility of being told off, and it causes tension.

When I feel vulnerable, uncertain, doubtful, between life and a dream of it—something those who know will understand—it still weighs on me that other kids' parents used to be wary of me because I was smelly, because I wore the same unwashed clothes. Then I remind myself, as in the flying dreams I used to have, of taking off. I led their children into adventure, driving cars at thirteen, walking as far as we could in waist-deep snow, smoking. Those parents, I now know, saw the possibility of this waywardness becoming infectious.

The cops inside are something else, a different kind of violence, demanding a "morality," a judgment be placed upon others, one informed by systems excluding the very possibility of a fullness of being. There is a deep decadence in the culture that mandates this policing, with rules made by bureaucrats in favour of owners of land, of power, of the world. It reminds me of how the interviewer speaks to Jean Genet in an episode of the *Arena* documentary series produced by the BBC in 1985. The interviewer takes on an authoritative voice, questioning Genet on his life, his beliefs, his subversions. *Have you always felt apart?* he asks. *Have there been moments when you weren't apart? Not even once?* His tone is sly and condescending, he speaks as sober citizen—he whose internal morality mirrors that of society, of money—but Genet turns the tables, and the camera, in an electrifying way. Later in the interview, refusing to remain the passive subject of the shoot, Genet points to the interviewer, the crew, all seven of them. *There*

1 A 2023 *Reuters* article cites data from the United Nations that "some 700,000 settlers live in 279 settlements across the West Bank and East Jerusalem, up from 520,000 in 2012."

2 The Oslo Accords divided the Palestinian West Bank into three zones, A, B, and C. Area C is the largest, and under full Israeli civil and security control. This is where most of the illegal Israeli settlements and outposts are.

is the norm on one side, where you are, he says. *Then there is the margin, where I am*. Now the camera swings back to reveal those on the other side. The order is broken. The illusion, the interrogative logic, is disassembled.

I remember poet, playwright, and activist Shailja Patel insisting on the obvious point (yet one readily ignored by those in power, including cultural gatekeepers) that nobody is silent; their voices just need to be amplified.

I have been affected deeply by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's research into the activation of the archive, to render alive what is deemed absent. In her recent book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, she writes,

> History as an imperial discipline tells plausible stories, without questioning the violence that provides its practitioners with the building blocks that render the stories plausible—worlds shredded violently into legible pieces to compose historical narratives . . . Potential history is the attempt to make impossible the transmutation of violence into history.

I often think of film language as a language of war, and I am certainly not the only one to note this, as the technology developed alongside military uses. How then to work in this language, consciously and regardless of its association with *shooting*, *target*, *cut*? The moving image, across platforms, is used so pervasively as an extension of power—by nation-states, by corporations. Toni Morrison wrote that "oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge."

As a filmmaker I seek always to listen to those affected by violence without foregrounding my own rage at the injustice, and to know the difference between licence and courage.

Salim and I prepare our two-day workshop. We take as a starting point our own discrete practices in film. We often develop projects over long periods of time, even up to a decade. Our films range from no-budget to more supported works, the latter at times confronting us with the need to navigate preconceptions by funding bodies and other stakeholders of how stories should be told. Crucially, we see no-budget not as a scarcity but through a framing of abundance, meaning there is nothing holding us back. Imposed scarcity is often a means toward exclusion and even prohibition. Industrial participation requires assimilation to certain "rules of the game." The scarcity/abundance model is a capitalist framework that devours the multiple possibilities existing around us.

I know this because my films often feature protagonists whose stories have been rejected or quieted by those in power and who are therefore perceived to be outside the mainstream. When it comes to explaining the filmmaking process or outcome to those who ask—and because of the way culture works (who is included and excluded from it), it is mostly those embedded in dominant narratives who ask—I need to do a lot of undoing. Frequently, people tell me, probably with admiration or in support or with some sense of uneasiness, I never can tell, that I, or rather my work, "gives voice to the voiceless." Sometimes,

but often enough to mention it, I am told the people in my films "are so lucky to have met you," to have "something creative to do." When people say this, they assume the people in my work, which is my community and also me, would otherwise simply have suffered in misery, as if devoid of internal life outside of a corrective gaze. It's peculiar, this, and usually, probably mostly always, entangled with the belief that it is everyone's inevitable desire to move in a certain direction socially, culturally, materially. Many who consider themselves mindful viewers and commentators play a part in producing this gaze—not always hostile, of course, but objectifying nonetheless.

Instead of getting lifts, I aim to walk anywhere within an hour's radius, and this morning I walk to a workshop organized by the Palestinian Animal League. Google Maps leads me through the refugee camp instead of bypassing it. The street Google takes me on is as narrow as one outstretched arm. I didn't intend to be a tourist in this refugee camp and would usually only come if invited. Passing through denies respect and privacy to those who live here, qualities barely afforded anyway in these narrow streets. I get stares now, not the usual friendly ones, and I deserve them.

In all my time here, almost nobody has mentioned anything about my hair, which is closely cropped, just beginning to grow back after its last shave. It's been this way ever since I was seventeen, when a stylist friend experimented on me and the clippers slipped. Throughout my life, the look has caused misunderstandings—not least of all my being taken for Sinéad O'Connor on the street and offered free entry into clubs. But in between such moments, I tend to forget about my hair.

In a beautiful old house near Ramallah, I visit a retired physicist as part of my research into things made by hand; his partner has written extensively on Palestinian embroidery. He asks, with a glimmer of pleasure in knowing something new, whether I am *she* or *they*. His partner is embarrassed by the question. She says it's unimportant. I shrug and tell them it's lovely to be considered. I mean it.

I notice Shireen Abu Akleh street in the middle of Ramallah and send an image of the road sign to Umama. Today marks one year since the journalist was killed. Samah, Pablo, and I are in the Jenin refugee camp to meet Mustafa at the Freedom Theatre. Mustafa asks if we want to go for a walk. Moving slowly in the heat, he greets everyone, shop workers, passersby, people sitting in doorways, looking at us. How, I wonder, does our small group meet this gaze. I sense a premonition of what violence is to come here, again and again.

A woman on the bus offers me a seat and, when I ask for directions, turns and says, *Have you heard the news? Now all will change. I know it. I can feel it.* Just earlier, Lina told me how exhausted she was, always having to be so switched on.

I always like seeing Ahmad. I understand his facial muscles. I can see he also understands mine. We both go to the mountains when the grief is too strong and we need to decompress.

What are your triggers? he says.

Privilege— It just comes out.

He laughs knowingly. I try to be clearer as it is such an entangled thing. He simplifies it for me, *Those who behave with entitlement*. For him it used to be yellow licence plates.[3] He tells me about growing up in a refugee camp. About the countless arrests, starting at childhood. There is always a silence underlying his speech. I like listening to him, how he tells of his life. We speak about those who wish not to use force, and those who do. Where does the sadness go, when it leaves (if it does)?

What is the meaning of a life when it is always contained, spatially and socially?

Mariam speaks of breath, how she is thinking of breath as a quantum physics, entering, exiting, spreading, mingling . . .

Sari insists that identity is what matters. It is fluid and only becomes fixed when barred from developing. It must be living. It cannot be imposed. It needs to respond, slip across edges and boundaries. He thinks religious people wear a uniform of belonging in a way that makes sense to them, and he is not judgmental, but he means it produces homogeneity, a disavowal of self, of personal form. For him, growing up in East Jerusalem, being in a group provided a strong feeling of belonging, yet everyone, it seemed to him—and this was the important point—was also, at the same time, an individual.

Shuruq, Samah, and I think about belonging. Such a fragile process, especially since we share a knowing of prolonged violence, and the knowing that each of ours is different, and the wish to explore that space between us. We allow each other mistakes, imperfections, alertness to the possibility of failing. I mention that Therese has suggested the theme of encounter for an edited anthology, and I wonder whether encounter, in its next iteration, becomes commitment.

Penny thinks dwelling in nostalgia risks making one passive. Lately I think about what it means to be in or out of time. I realize that being out of time is a form of political or cultural erasure—a sequencing of spatial possibility into a string of old-and-new, then-and-now, traditional-and-modern binaries of "progress"—and that I am drawn to ideas of non-growth, degrowth, space without time. Time as circular and self-referential.

Initially I found Raja Shehadeh's books through my love of walking. He asks how one can traverse a vanishing landscape. What happens when the possibility of walking is increasingly prohibited, even outright dangerous. Walking the hills around Birzeit and Ramallah where he has lived most of his life, he writes, "I realised I could no longer walk on this land without feeling that I was crossing into forbidden territory."

I join Ibrahim and the Let's Hike Palestine group. The first hike is to a Canaanite village called Al Jib (near Jerusalem) with a winery that is thousands of years old, as well as an equally aged water trough placed along the ancient trade route.

Kafr Kanna is where it is said Jesus turned water into wine. Someone on the hike says that for them, freedom means no borders. We cross though the fields onto the path, where a car with a donkey tied to the

back passes by. The donkey has no eyes and must have been dead for some time. Watching it well into the distance, all of us voice some kind of sadness at this full but lifeless form, when a boy on a living donkey emerges over the rise, riding past us with a beaming smile. Beside him follows another donkey without halter or rope. We watch them for longer. The sight provokes a mix of conversations on the meaning of death. There has been so much of that these last few days.

Nidal exclaims that he refuses the word *colonization*. *We are occupied!* He looks at me directly and says, *Your country is responsible for this!*

Nothing makes sense, he adds. *This is a country of nonsense.*

Gareth draws my attention to the fact that in English it is almost impossible to speak without including terms of militarization, financializaton, and ecological damage; talk of conquering and victory; value, worth, and reward; dirty and soiled items . . .

I watch a livestream of London, showing an endless queue passing the coffin of the queen. This absent body is also the body politic. This link is direct.

Here I am in a foundational landscape. If I film a tree, I am filming a tree growing in the actual source terrain of monotheistic world history. A tree has a single root system, and it has branches. The three monotheistic religions all share the same origin, locations, and stories.

I think of Farah telling me that people here build such big houses because most of life is spent inside, as it is not safe to be outside.

On our way to the Al Naqab I notice the driver undo his seat belt every time we enter a Palestinian area. Later I realize this is quite a usual thing to do.

Ra'fat points at the electricity pylons passing overhead, bypassing the villages below. We stand between two villages, the Bedouin Tel as-Sabi and the Israeli Omer, with one kilometre in between them. I ask Ra'fat, How was your childhood? *I have never been asked that question*. What was a day like for you as a child? What did you have for breakfast? *I didn't have breakfast. There are eight of us and our mother had so much to do in the morning*. When was your first meal? *At school*. What was school like? *I loved school. I excelled at school. But it was not an easy time. I was very shy. I had two years when I didn't speak. I was hiding what happened at home. I loved all my teachers, even the ones who were cruel. I understood later they were so because they wanted the best for me, and us*. What did you want to be when growing up? *A doctor. I studied in Romania to become one, but I learned about myself I could not be a doctor. I studied law, but I couldn't go to the bar because I have been to prison*. You must have been so young when in Romania. *Eighteen*. He tells me that aged sixteen he had bones broken by the police. *There is even a special unit for policing the Bedouin, constituted from mostly economically marginalized others within a country of others*. He is making an advanced study of the Arabic language to understand its song.

3 Palestinian cars with white/green licence plates cannot enter certain areas without a special permit. Cars with yellow licence plates can traverse the West Bank and Israel.

I remember the nature writer Robert Macfarlane questioning the relationship between beauty and atrocity in a post-massacre landscape. Is it possible to take pleasure in such a place? Was it Anselm Kiefer who said there is no innocent landscape?

Daliah tells me about a "cauliflower tree" nearby, which has been genetically altered by ongoing tear-gassing from the Israeli army.

Samah and I have an exchange about plants and our being drawn to them. I tell her about my visit with Shada and Salim to Sittee Amina, about eating half a kilo of dates in three days, and about how I thought I heard her say she was fifty-seven but she is seventy-five. Samah replies that according to the author Nawal Nasrallah, who has done extensive research on food history in Iraq and who has a lovely book on the world history of the date palm, this tree is polyamorous and falls in love with other trees. She says, *I like that personification of the tree's intimate life*.

We sign our exchange, *Long live the date palm!*

Physician and scholar Tawfiq Canaan writes that

> the Palestinian does not look at the trees simply as plants, but as beings endowed with supernatural powers. The spirits of the upper (and to a lesser degree those of the lower) world, even his local saints, the *awliya*, may live and appear in them. This explains the mysterious fact that sixty per cent of all Mohammedan shrines are associated with trees.

Hind tells me about the Israeli Ambassadors' Forest and how the planting of trees erases history, covers former villages and renders them antique, cloaks graveyards, uses up groundwater, and destroys the delicate ecological balance while denying those who have inhabited the region for centuries, especially the Bedouin of the Al Naqab, their right to the land. Only the former South African ambassador refused to have trees planted in his or his country's name, saying that it replicated apartheid.

In this heat, a new road cut into the side of the hill provides a welcome shortcut. I watch a butterfly, and this directs my eyes above. There it is, like a crown! Half of the roots of an olive tree are exposed by the cut of the hill. As if still gripping the earth, the tree's spindly roots grasp the air. The leafy branches of the crown reach into the blue sky, so full of life, spreading its arms as if to say *I am here*. I am sure it smiles at me, vibrant and exuberant. Does the tree know it is now threatened? Immediately I know this is a silly question, as the tree might find a way to survive even this.

Across the West Bank there are water tanks on the rooftops of Palestinian homes. The water tanker comes weekly. Not to the homes of settlers, who have privileged access to groundwater.

We see how settlers are waved though checkpoints. I think of one where we got out of the car to pick up a stray puppy by the roadside, and how the IDF soldier was extremely helpful in this, because of the puppy . . .

Eirini, a psychotherapist, recently told me about the difference between people going to a forest to hike and those going to a forest to hunt and kill—not for food or any reason other than to engage in blood sports. In the U.K., it is conservatively estimated that around thirty million game birds are bred for shooting every single year. Hunters wanting a trophy, to heal some internal wound through the death of another being, have always terrified me. This calculating and indefatigable violence against another species, just because they can.

I shudder remembering S. Yizhar's *Khirbet Khizeh* and the boredom of killing.

Nasarine shows me the book she wrote about a child in Gaza who lost her legs. Other children collect materials to make new limbs for her.

There is a helicopter overhead. I am glued to the news. Since the day the bombing of Gaza started again, the journalist now wears a helmet.

Salim and Shada show me their town, Majdal Shams. We meet a town elder, Salman. In the 1980s he made a film about the minefields. He asks me what I have seen, and I ask him back. *What I see is that there used to be almond trees everywhere. I see now that this is a three-star refugee camp.* Salim and I gaze into the valley, facing away from the minefields and barbed-wire fence, and Salim suddenly says, *The occupation is always in the background.*

Ist die Sprache wichtiger als wie man sie spricht? Nazeh and I fall into speaking German. Er erzählt über die Druze Kultur der Seelenwanderung die passiert wenn jemand traumatish stirbt. *Dann hat die Seele ja nochmal die chance zu heilen?*

Mariam, Majd, and I share a drink. A boy comes into the bar. Mariam knows him. He is selling chewing gum for three coins. We buy some. *Yes, I am going to school. I am studying, yes.* What happened to your foot? *I got shot by a rubber bullet three days ago at a protest. Please don't tell my mother.*

I didn't expect Tania's soprano voice. It vibrates inside my ribs. Rima, accompanying her on the piano, wrote this mournful song for a mother whose two children were shot by Israeli soldiers while throwing stones.

Bojana can sense when she's in a place where people have died. She fears this and being thought of as strange. Her perception is mysterious, and I believe her. I liked her right away when we met. She tells me how in her mother's generation this was not at all an unusual sense, the same as speaking with trees and plants.

I ask Ahmed, What does it mean to consider the lives of others, and what does it mean to consider other lives? He speaks of playing with one's life as a form of resistance. He knew that when his first daughter was born, he needed to continue living, despite the odds. Love would be the core of his world-making. Showing others how to be kind and have empathy

with those deemed abject, he thinks, is a practice of refusal: Refusing to fulfill the intentions of those bent on typecasting him and others like him. Refusing to be provoked into anger.

John Berger writes in his essay "Stones" that

> poverty forces the hardest choices which lead to almost nothing. Poverty is living with that *almost*. . . .
>
> I am among not the conquered but the defeated, whom the victors fear. The time of the victors is always short and that of the defeated unaccountably long.

We speak about remembering those who died in resistance struggles across the world. Yazid says it is a mistake to focus exclusively on the individual who died. What is important is to acknowledge those who enabled their lives, those unseen who feed, nurse, care for.

Samah and I talk about shame, survivors' shame.

Akram is afraid of growing harder, more fixed, and seeks a way to work through this. I know this feeling also; it's a kind of exhaustion. How to remain light, nimble.

I meet a woman at a bar, and we start talking. She tells me she was in prison for forty-five days; her brother is still incarcerated. She says there are different types of soldiers, some older ones harsh and brutal, some of the nineties Russian ones more apologetic.

Someone else tells me there are prison cells numbered according to severity. Some in which you can only stand up but not lean against the walls, as they are deliberately lacerating. I remember stories from my grandfather of his being tortured in the gulag in a cage where he could neither lie down nor sit.

This reminds me of John Berger's observation that while there are prisons, we have prisons inside of us.

The 218 bus has already been waiting for more than an hour at Qalandia checkpoint. I wear my headphones and listen to Isabella Hammad's *Enter Ghost* on audiobook as young soldiers board the bus. They appear uncomfortable with the task asked of them, though I may simply be biased by my restlessness. I hear the book's narrator wonder at the soldier as a sacred figure: "When they look at their soldiers, they see sons and daughters. When we look at their soldiers, our hearts also beat harder, although it is for different reasons."

I check WhatsApp and see a message from Abdallah. A member of his family was murdered by a settler.

> We are, I am, you are
> by cowardice or courage
> the one who find our way
> back to this scene
> carrying a knife, a camera
> a book of myths
> in which
> our names do not appear.
>
> — Adrienne Rich

He is young, maybe twenty. *Where are you from?* I was born in Germany. *I love Germany*. Have you been? *No, I can't leave. Because I was in prison*.

His friend adds, *Three years. He didn't finish school*.

I suddenly think about home, and it troubles me, a melancholy that returns whenever I think of where I was born. How it shapes one's destiny. I too am a product of a particular history, and my experience is deeply bound with intergenerational trauma. My mother had something broken inside, and it came out with such violence when she drank. My grandfather was a drinker too, to forget his time in the gulag. I do not remember any kind or gentle touch when I was a kid, only frequent strikes. Growing up in a series of council estates, ending up in a so-called relief city, we were hidden away in eighteen-storey blocks far from the city centre. I kept being suspended from school for wearing dirty clothes, and no one ever wondered how a seven-year-old came to be wearing them. Now I have the privilege of this passport. To use this well is also to know the need for systemic change for all.

The etymology of the word *radical* is the Latin *radic*, meaning "root." The simple idea of being "radical" is problematic now, as the far right has been more successful than the left in realizing their radical agenda, in inciting major structural, political, and economic change. We should not use *any* words casually.

Here is the house where the poet Fadwa Tuqan lived, Majeed says. *Don't take any pictures. People don't like tourists here because they think they are Israeli spies trying to figure out the maze of the old city*. There are no tourists here at all because of the incidents in the previous weeks. Then there are shots. Samah thinks they are fireworks. The looks on some of the women's faces suggest otherwise. Young men look at their phones, run toward the source of the shooting. Everyone else rushes the other way. Majeed takes us back to the hotel. *Don't worry. Stay close to me*. We cross through back alleys to the hotel. The shots intensify. He says, *They are shooting into the air. The sound of horizontal shooting is different*. Many elders come into the hotel shaking their heads, as if to say *These young hotshots* . . . My heart is racing.

In 2011, the Israeli parliament passed the "Nakba Law," allowing the Israeli Minister of Finance to reduce or withdraw funding to organizations, cultural and community institutions—any public institution—that engage in activities that either contradict Israel's Independence Day or mark the day on which the state was established as a day of mourning. In the twelve years since, such policies have spread across the United States and Europe, most notably in Germany (with its laws against BDS and related activities), where to be supportive of the Palestinians now is almost a crime.

Israel's National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir attends Jerusalem Day. Some attendees chant "Kahane was right," along with "Death to the Arabs!"

After Majd leaves, I overhear two women at the next table, working for NGOs or the UN, exclaim enthusiastically, *We are opening up new opportunities!*

Later, I search for Ben-Gvir's speech.

Someone whose name I didn't fully hear tells us about red dwarf stars, which are older than our sun and less than 1 percent as bright. They are cool, slow-burning stars, and that is the secret of their longevity. They live far longer than any other star. TRAPPIST-1 has its own planets, each about the size of Earth. The planets trapped in its orbit have one side permanently facing the star, the other permanently into space. Planets with two extreme faces.

When Schams greets me, I ask, Does your name mean sun?

In the old house in the centre of Ramallah is a fridge magnet quoting Bob Marley: "You never know how strong you are until being strong is your only choice."

I meet friends at a bar where Mazen is playing the oud. It is packed, with everyone singing along.

I remember the composer Pauline Oliveros asking if we are creating the sound we hear by listening or if the sound is creating our listening.

Rima tells me *I wish more people would make music. To make music is to learn to be able to listen, especially when in a concert setting. Then there would be more harmony.*

I remember, in the documentary *I Heard It Through the Grapevine*, James Baldwin passes a line of protesters and asks a person with him how one should account for all those unnamed in history books.

I remember John Berger said that protest is in the present *for the present*.

I remember writer and anthropologist David Graeber saying that direct action is seeking to imagine that the world we want is already there.

Ahmad wants to set up a community called Exit. Leaderless, it will be populated by all those who want to live independent of permanent oppression.

This morning the artist collective Resolve put the brakes on their Barbican show in London because of the centre's attempted censorship due to their Palestinian collaborator. It is only in moments like these that the public becomes aware of this form of silencing.

Adania says that *Palestine is not only a place, it is also a lesson*.