Chapter 5
Derivative Presence: Loss and Lives in Limbo in the West Bank

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Introduction: Voids

My endeavor to enquire ethnographically into absence – absence of words, of social categories and of human lives in discourse and imaginaries – seems to spur particular and significant reactions in the course of conversation. When I tell people, academics or NGO representatives based in Palestine, Geneva, or Amman about my study of politics and affect among wives of political detainees from the West Bank, the reactions are not as diverse as one might envision. Some say, with a shrug, "*Oh, I see, but do you also speak with the detainees themselves? Because, as you know, they are the ones who are truly suffering*"? Another response is "*Why don't you speak with the martyr's widows or their mothers instead, that will tell you what suffering is really about in Palestine*." Revealing what is taken to be a proper infliction and what is not these comments point toward the existence of a register of acknowledging suffering in Palestinian life. In this register, there are those whose ailment is ranked, yet there are also those whose place in the register is less a place than a void. These are the women who are married to Palestinian detainees, women who can be said to be present in that register exclusively by means of their detained husband's absence. The presence of certain forms of life and of suffering in the imaginary (Taylor 2004) of what is worth paying attention to discloses what Runia has termed "the stowaway to presence," namely a void, an absence that is invisible yet intrinsically there (Runia 2006b: 1). Conceptualizing the matter of absence in the lives of Palestinian women related to either martyrs or detainees is the object of this chapter.

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Framing Absence

The living room is considered to be the most significant space in a Palestinian household; it is the room where guests are received. A lot of effort and resources go into decorating this room, since it serves as a representation of the family and its relative prosperity and not least its ability to receive guests. As elsewhere in the Middle East (Schryock 2004; Abu-Lughod 1986; 1993), hospitality is a key value in the occupied territories. The arrangement of the living room thus refers to how the inhabitants wish their guests to see and think of them.

For families who have lost a male member of the family, temporarily or permanently, it becomes even more significant to display their propriety and social values. The arrangement of the living room of a young female informant, Amina, will serve as a poignant image. The stylish décor of Amina's tidy living room is dominated by one thing in particular. A 100×80 cm poster in a gold frame occupies one corner. The photostat displays a portrait of a young man in profile wearing a combat uniform, holding an AK-47 rifle, the most common weapon in the occupied territories. The background of the photostat is a waterfall set among rocky cliffs and green pine trees. Almost unnoticed, the lower right hand corner of the big photostat holds a passport size photo of another man, a simple portrait, showing only the face of the man. The big photo displays Amina's first husband who was killed by Israeli soldiers and who is therefore considered to be a martyr (*as-shahid*). The smaller photo is of Amina's second husband, her late husband's brother, who is a political detainee (*al-azeer*), sentenced to spend 30 years in Israeli prison.

The stark contrast in size and ornamentation between the two photos of Amina's husbands is a material illustration of my overall aim in this chapter. I hope to show that in the occupied territories the absence of a husband is perceived in radically different ways depending on the permanency or temporal character of his absence. This, in turn leads to equally different acknowledgement in what could be called a hierarchy of suffering for the absentee's female relatives, to the extent that it is appropriate to introduce the term "derivative presence." Absence, in this paper, is thus framed through a concern with the materiality of human relations. I investigate this through an optic of loss; both material and intangible kinds of loss and absence that make themselves present in the world. I argue that this can be said to determine gendered social being in the occupied territories at present, understood here as both the occupied Palestinian territories and Palestine as a social imaginary (Taylor 2004).

This concern forms part of an overarching research interest in tracing the category of what is termed "the secondary victim" in the field of psychosocial interventions in conflict areas (cf. Hein et al. 1993; Kanninen et al. 2002; Salo et al. 2004). I set out to explore this by focusing on torture survivors and their families in the occupied territories, a place and a situation where it is predominantly men who are torture victims or survivors.

Because my main field context is the occupied territories, hesitancy is pertinent when applying the categories of "torture victim" or "torture survivor." The UN convention against torture (UN 1984) is quite unambiguous with regard to what

counts as torture. However, from ongoing engagement with the rehabilitation sector for torture survivors in Gaza and the West Bank, I became aware that torture as a forensic term makes little sense to employ, since it is not uncommon among Palestinians to articulate themselves as a collective of torture survivors to varying and competing degrees, irrespective of the UN definition of torture. Rather, torture in Palestinian vernacular covers a range of experienced encroachments, including checkpoint abuse, the regime of permissions to enter or leave the occupied territories and most notably death and captivity of the Palestinian population due to *al-ihtilal*: the (Israeli) occupation.

These afflictions, however, are not considered equally torturous or worthy of acknowledgement in popular national discourse. This makes it appropriate to speak of a hierarchy of suffering (Farmer 2003, 1997), in which some infringements such as death or detention in Israeli prisons hold the pivotal place (Allen 2006, 2009; Butler 2004). The place of martyrs and the political detainees at the top of such a hierarchy mirrors the Palestinian situation, in which the most honorable activities a man, and to some extent a woman, can undertake are so-called operations of resistance to the Israeli occupation (Nashif 2008: 25; Peteet 1991; Allen 2008). This fact must be understood in the context of the historical and ongoing situation in the occupied territories, that Roy has termed "de-development" (Roy 1995, 2007). This term defines Israeli politics of closure and restricted access to export and infrastructure as a process aimed at causing a standstill of Palestinian economic growth. One result of this is poverty rates rising to 65% in the Gaza Strip and 38% in the West Bank in 2004 (Passia 2008: 349). With a lack of financial means of securing education or migration, social status and upward mobility are difficult to achieve unless one participates in activities that counter the Israeli occupation and its impingement on Palestinian economic, social, and political life (Allen 2006). Accordingly, in the hierarchy of people who have sacrificed their lives, hopes and personal well-being for the national struggle for a state, and who occupy the most important places, are primarily *al-shahid*, which coins the notion of the martyr and secondarily, the political detainee *al-azeer* (Nashif 2008: 19; Khalili 2007).

The difference between the two may be understood with regards to three aspects, namely religion, temporality, and the question of ambiguity. A martyr who has lost his life in the struggle for Palestine has made the ultimate sacrifice: his or her life. This sacrifice is both a religious sacrifice due to the meaning of martyrs in Islam (Allen 2006), and it is a national sacrifice in the effort to create a Palestinian state (Khalili 2007). The martyr and the detainee diverge also with regard to time and closure. For the martyr, his death finalizes his life and turns him into a martyr, whereas the detainee is still alive. The detainee has sacrificed his freedom but not his life, and his is thus not an ultimate sacrifice. These aspects render the martyr an unambiguous figure, whereas the detainee remains ambiguous in his captivity, where he according to Nashif is a liminal figure (Nashif 2008: 96). The ambiguity of the detainee in contrast to the martyr also rests on the uncertainty concerning what is thought to take place during captivity in an Israeli prison. This elusiveness allows people through the production of rumor to worry or guess whether the detainee has surrendered to Israeli pressure and has provided the prison managers with information,

thereby potentially stooping to national treachery. As Das writes, the power of rumor lies in the way in which experiences can come to live through the act of telling (Das 2007: 208). Through rumor, the heroism of the detainee may be doubted.

These potential allegations notwithstanding, for many Palestinians, the martyr and the detainee epitomize the heroism of the agents in the national struggle for a Palestinian state in a double sense; not only are they praised in popular national discourse for having been willing to pay the ultimate price for a greater common good (Allen 2006; Nashif 2008; Khalili 2007). In the local and international discourse of conflict intervention, too, the martyrs and detainees are portrayed as the primary victims, because of the possible consequences of death, physical, and mental torment after prison or a failed, but wounding, operation against the Israeli occupation (Salo et al. 2004).

The so-called secondary victims, then, are the mothers, the children, and the wives of these perceived heroic men (Lau 2003; Sideris 2001). In order to fully grasp the meaning of being a secondary victim, I have done fieldwork among women married to detainees, widows of martyrs as well as among local and international NGOs offering services to these families. An underlying concern throughout the chapter is the notion of secondary victimhood as a lens through which to envisage suffering, and to investigate the absence in language or imagery it produces (Fassin 2008). As I put forward in this chapter, it is in the texture of these absences that the social capital of suffering and either primary or secondary recognition reside, defining in pervasive ways what counts as victimization.

Focusing on wives of detainees or widows of martyrs, this chapter highlights how different registers of absence have appeared, and have turned into significant vehicles of understanding gendered social being in the occupied territories. The absence of these women's husbands has proven important, because there is a tension between the absence experienced by wives of detainees and widows of martyrs respectively. Through these empirical voids, absence has thus emerged as an analytical prism, through which one can view the women's lives and their situation as gendered beings and the way they live and are looked upon, both locally and internationally. Analysing the intertwining of intangible loss and the texture of absence in Palestinian women's lives, I argue that the presence or absence of a husband is a significant marker of the women's presence in a social world.

This raises questions about why a situation in which *loss* defines a woman's social presence and existence, as in the case of the martyrs' widows, is different from a situation in which *absence* defines a woman's social presence and existence, as in the case of the detainees' wives. And, following from this, what is it about the materiality of loss that makes it legitimate to acknowledge some experiences as a loss, and others as mere absence? I suggest that we can only understand the difference between the respective ways in which martyrs' widows and detainees' wives are perceived through an optic that investigates the meaning of loss and sacrifice in a local and international context on the one hand, and by attending to the structural relationship between men and women in the occupied territories on the other.

At first glance, the obvious way of understanding what is at stake would be to consider analytically the classic anthropological concept of liminality (Turner 1967,

1974, 1986) in relation to loss and transformation of social status as experienced by the Palestinian women. But the question is what liminality means in a situation when the supposedly liminal transcends the temporally transitional and becomes permanent? Attempting to contribute to anthropological analysis of precisely these matters, I hope to use this chapter to move through but beyond liminality in the search for a viable mode of understanding the meaning of loss and absence in relation to gendered presence in the social world of the occupied territories.

Presenting the Loss of Palestine

Among historians and social scientists alike, Palestine seems to serve as crystallization of a place, in which the past is not past but present (Abu-Lughod and Sa'adi 2007). Every personal and collective story that is told about loss, violence, or death in present time is always already inscribed within the larger story of the Palestinians as a people defined by their losses, loss of a homeland, loss of family members, and loss of human dignity. The meta-narrative of all these stories is the 1948 event of "Al Nakba," which literally means the catastrophe. According to Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, more than 700.000 Palestinians were uprooted in the establishment of the Israeli state (Pappé 2006: xiii). This story is one that has affected generations of Palestinians in that the event turned them into the exceptional category of "Palestine Refugees" (Rubenberg 2003: 13), a term that determines first, second, and third generations of Palestinians' access to land, kin, and status as citizens in contemporary Israel and the occupied territories.

Rather than providing a currency of the drawn-out or even futile peace process, suffice it to say that loss, bereavement, coping, and making sense where there seems to be none, are not extraordinary events but part of everyday life and discourse (Das 2007). Events of sudden death, disappearance, and violence are found in all families. Households without a martyr or a detainee are few and far between. As such, images of widows and mothers mourning the loss of their sons or husbands in the struggle for a Palestinian state are highly present in local and international media (Allen 2009).

The public display of mourning is paralleled privately by the families and widows of martyrs. During my fieldwork, they too spoke willingly and extensively about the martyr. Often, the narrative about a martyr is a well-rehearsed story about the martyr's deeds, the detailed, visceral circumstances of his death (Allen 2009), and the emotionally straining loss of a father or a husband. In the majority of the life stories of widows and mothers of martyrs, the loss was framed as a narrative of meaningful loss, despite affective cracks in the stories, where religious and, in particular, national meaning did not really make up for the personal loss. This is somewhat contrary to what such a loss is supposed and assumed to do in Palestinian, national imagery and public discourse, and among international observers claiming to "know" Palestinian human losses to be incommensurable with loss of a life in Western cultural spheres, because of the alleged meaningfulness rendered to martyrdom in both religion and Palestinian nationalism (for discussion of this see Allen 2006).

In both national and international imaginaries of Palestinian suffering and in private conceptualizations of bereavement, some images of suffering and loss are more materially present than others. For example, there is a strong public awareness in Palestine of the 8,500 detainees (Btselem 2008) who are currently detained in Israeli prisons for the participation in political activities forming part of the resistance against the occupation (Jean-Klein 2003; Nashif 2008). And images of "a Palestinian mother" who mourns and suffers the loss of her sons to either death or imprisonment circulate and are recognized in formal as well as informal social fora. Significantly, the wives of the aforementioned political detainees are present only through the contours of their absence in this elaborate discourse. Through the following examples, I will describe what modes of affliction that define presence and absence in the occupied territories and how these are interwoven with notions of value, loss, and gendered being.

Lives in Limbo

Throughout my interviews, there is a void in explanations as to the qualitative difference between being the wife of a detainee and the widow of a martyr. This void in the data is not due to lack of questions about it on my part, but it can be explained by something apparently intrinsic to the situation of living with an absent husband while not having suffered an absolute loss. The wives of the detainees, I suggest, live with an absence that defies both verbalization and graphic materialization. The absolute loss experienced by a martyr's widow, on the other hand, marks a stark contrast to the elusive nature of absence that the wives of the detainees live with. The story of Samiah shows the difference between the two.

In the home of Samiah, a wife of a martyr, the relative splendor of the living room shows a stark contrast to the rest of the worn-down, sparsely inhabited concrete house. Samiah's damp, dark living room has as its main attraction two centerpieces standing on two pedestals. In one of the centerpieces figures a pair of men's spectacles together with a photograph of Samiah's deceased husband. In the other is his plastic digital watch. The clock is still running. *"I cannot bring myself to stop it, so it still has its alarm set for 8 o'clock in the morning. In that sense my husband lives on with me, may God be with him. I know, every morning that the clock will set off. You see, he is still part of my day,"* Samiah said.

The way in which Amina, whom we met in the beginning of the chapter, and Samiah's martyred husbands stay with them through artifacts as part of the women's lives, alludes to the ability of rendering materiality and presence to their losses and to the memory of the deceased martyr after his death.

The described objects serve as personal metaphors for the absentee. It is, however, not only through such manifest objects that the women's husbands stay with their families. In these particular families' interpretation of Islam, an interpretation that by other Palestinians is considered to be traditional and to a certain extent extremist, the martyr is believed not to leave his body; in a sense his bodiliness

stays with him. Amina's mother-in-law explained this to me: "*A martyr is not a dead in the way we normally think of death. His spirit stays alive, and as Muslims we believe that he has a guarantee to enter paradise and that no one else has that guarantee. And, you know, the martyr's body stays warm and fresh; it does not decay or smell bad. That's why when I first encountered the sweet scent of a martyr, I prayed to God that one day my son will smell like the martyr.*" The sense in which the martyr's absence gives way to his eternal presence in the lives of his close kin figures clearly in Amina's mother-in-law's account of the martyrdom of her son.

Pointing to a possible difference between affinal and consanguine kin, the martyrs' widows spoke differently from Amina's mother-in-law. At the same time, as the martyr's presence is secured among his bereaved family through objects, imaginaries and sensual perceptions, the widows all underlined that their life with him was a closed chapter. His absence in the widow's life, even though his absence was what ensured his eternal presence, was certain and unambiguous. This is what renders a martyr's widow an honorable social presence (cf. Allen 2006 for discussion of this). A martyr's relatives know where he is, that he is dead, that they lost him, and this sense of closure allows them to mourn for him. The widows I spoke with all tried in different ways to move on, start their own life, finish their education and get a job. Apart, that is, from Amina whose second husband is still detained.

Amina only spoke about her husband in prison when probed by one of my direct questions. Showing more than a family resemblance to other interviews with detainees' wives, I would argue that this is because, as opposed to the widows, who could narrate a well-rehearsed story complying with popular templates of recounting sacrifice, Amina has no story to tell. The story of her imprisoned husband is not closed. It is a story without an ending; and thus a story that cannot legitimize proper mourning, a claim to suffering or a spectacular materialization of her loss. However, intertwined with a deeply embodied national discourse of loss and mourning, to Amina herself, lack of talk about her second husband, also had to do with her feelings toward him. Whereas her first husband became someone she loved very much, in her own words her second husband was "*nice, polite and a good father for the children.*" But it was never him she thought or dreamt about. But to talk about life as a wife of a detainee is to talk about a void: about places, times, and situations that were somehow not quite right because something was and continued to be missing.

Another person I talked to was Naima, a female employee of the council of the village of Dar Noura. I had talked to Naima about the occupation: "*People in Dar Noura were responsible for a lot of important stages of the Palestinian revolution. Important operations were done by people from here. Even though it was not good for the families, people from all over Palestine respect us because of it.*" Naima's comment was said with pride in having participated in the struggle against the occupation. However, at the same time Naima conveyed how the heroic deeds had not only affected the families of the men in a positive way. Her quote speaks of the complexity of knowing the limits of efficacy of national discourse in intimate spheres. Naima knows this not only from being a council employee. Her husband planned one of the operations she describes. As a consequence, he is imprisoned for lifetime, plus 70 years.

I participated in a three months' group therapeutic project for five detainees' wives in Dar Noura. The therapeutic project was initiated by an internationally funded NGO in Ramallah offering rehabilitation of torture victims. Alluding to the meaning of torture in local vernacular again, the centre's focus was the political detainees, and their families, the secondary victims of the men's captivity. When participating in the therapeutic sessions, the women in the group would talk at length about the way in which their neighbors and families were keeping their whereabouts under close surveillance, "*as if we are under a microscope*" as one woman put it. The aim of the therapists facilitating the group was to promote strength and empowerment, specifically in terms of telling the women to stay good but not to care too much about the comments and the gossip about them behind their backs. A formulated goal of this therapeutic group was the creation of a network of support among the women. In the beginning of the therapeutic project, the main therapist probed the women to speak about their feelings in relation to their husbands in captivity, their families, and "the village." This invitation was largely ignored, because of the potent forces of network and social relations. This points to a poignant difference between the actual significance of the social relations that make up the women's lives, and how these are imagined within a broadly defined Bion-inspired notion of group therapy which was the model employed in this instance. Within this idea of group therapy, it is the objective that the social relations of the groups' participants throughout the duration of the group make up a social forum in its own right; a forum where the participants can momentarily suspend their habitual social ties (cf. Bion 1996). For a number of reasons, this did not happen in the described therapeutic group project.

Because the village in question originates back mainly to one prominent family of the West Bank, the women in the group were related to each other either as consanguine or affinal kin. In the beginning of the therapeutic process, one of the women in the group, Layla, broke the news of her daughter's engagement. Layla is 39 years old and has four daughters. Due to her husband's key role in the aforementioned "operation", the Israeli authorities have demolished her house. Her husband has been sentenced to prison for 19 years, and he figures at the centre of one of many posters of the heroes of the second Intifada. Speaking about her daughter's engagement made Layla proud, yet also a bit sad. For one thing, Layla regrets the loneliness she will feel without her daughter in the house. But more importantly, perhaps, she was sad that her husband was not part of discussing the engagement, the suitability of the groom, the party, or any of the elements of a marriage that are thought to be the bride's father's responsibility. The other women in the group showed their understanding, saying that Layla had to do it anyway and should not worry about the gossip, telling her that she is still living even though her husband is in prison. Layla invited all of them to come to the wedding, as a wedding is considered a happy occasion for all villagers. The women, however, were all vague in their replies as to whether they were going to turn up on the night, and merely responded to Layla's invitation with an evasive *in shallah*, God willing.

On the actual wedding night, Layla looked stunning, wearing discrete make up and the exact same nice, subtle, and respectable clothes as her younger sister, with whom she shares the practical and moral responsibility of her household. Layla

handled the role of the hostess for the women's party well, yet her usual air of quiet sadness lingered with her even on this night. After a while of dancing, she came over and chatted. Asking her if she was happy, she looked away and said, "*there is something missing*," alluding to her husband. Layla's husband though, was not the only one missing. None of the members of the therapeutic group project, who were also Layla's near and distant kin relations were there. The only ones from the group were the two psychologists and myself. When I later asked Layla where the other women from the therapy group had been, she said she did not know. The following days, I posed the same question to the women of the group, and each of them excused herself. The women's absence from Layla's daughter's wedding illustrated the practical voids in the otherwise strong discourses of support and network in the village.

Although Layla is the most "simple" among the women in terms of economy and education, she is well liked and holds a good reputation, partly due to her husband's perceived heroic deeds. According to the discourse of collective pride about the village's heroes promoted by the employee of the village council, a marriage within one of the most heroic and sacrificing families would have been an appropriate place to display support for Layla and her family. Before going deeper into the role of social networks in relation to absent husbands, another example will serve to nuance this.

The issue of public appearance and social presence was a returning topic of conversation among my informants internally and with me, when speaking about their lives after their respective husbands had been detained. People in the village, as well as the women's close and distant relatives kept an eye on them. As my informant Mervat said during an interview with her and Muna "*It is as if when her husband is in prison a woman has to kill herself and she must put herself in the prison too. And at the same time, my husband is saying if I tell him how I feel, about my sadness, why are you crying, you must be proud of me, that I am in prison.*" Mervat added that her husband was always calling the house from the prison to see if she was home or out of the house. If she was out he would say, "where are you", "where have you been", "why are you going out", "who are you with", and "what are you wearing". No matter whom she was with or where she went, there would always be someone who claimed to have seen her in the company of someone not proper, wearing something inappropriate. "*After my husband was detained, I stopped being a woman, now I am just a mother,"* she would say.

A few days after the conversation with Muna and Mervat, I called in on Mervat to see if I could stop by for a chat with her one morning. She welcomed me and when I turned up with my assistant Rawan, Mervat looked different. Usually when she was at home, she wore an old, casual track suit. On that day, she wore her gold jewelry and a transparent blouse with a low neck line. In fact, a neck line so low that it visibly displayed a lacy, red bra beneath her clothes. During our chat, she would shift between covering herself up and letting us glimpse her lingerie until her oldest daughter demonstratively entered the living room with a safety pin, which Mervat awkwardly used to collect her clothes and cover herself up with.

Clearly referring to our discussion about womanhood and feminine identity the week before, Mervat's materialization of her female identity was, importantly, for Rawan and my eyes only. Any sign of femininity, sensuality or the like was confined

to the domestic sphere and could be displayed only for a close circle of female friends like Muna. This applied to all the women I knew. The first time I visited, the women were dressed up, but after the first visit they did not bother changing their clothes, since I stopped being a guest. If one of the women at a group meeting wore mascara, the others would comment. Some cheered and others exchanged glances. The disputed issue of wearing make-up even in women's closed fora elucidates how in this particular instance, a local discourse of social control, appropriate, and modest behaviour for women, and particularly women without their men, is not an abstract discourse but a lived orientation in the world, directed toward others and self (cf. Abu-Lughod 1986; 1993). It seems that social surveillance, even for someone who feels the effect of constant surveillance, forms a blind spot; a naturalization that comes with the stowaway to social structure.

Relating Mervat's display of her femininity to the event of Layla's daughter's wedding, I propose that to the detainees' wives, a wedding means something entirely different from the joyful event it is supposed to be. A wedding is normally the only event where women are allowed to let their hair down and wear festive, even sensual clothes and make up, and display femininity and womanhood in public. To the detainees' wives in Dar Noura, however, the wedding represented yet another occasion for villagers and neighbours to scrutinize the women's appearance. As such, the absence of the women's detained husbands, which is not considered to change anything because it is not recognized as a loss, proved instead to have caused a total transformation of self perception, life-world and gendered identity and of the women's social presence. The wives of the detainees seem to have become ambiguous figures, derivatively present through the absence of their husbands.

Ambiguity runs through the totality of the women's lives as illustrated in a conversation I had with Naima, the employee of the council over a Friday lunch in her house. I commented on her new short crop, in reply to which she said: "*I am so frustrated, I did not know what to do, so after my visit to Hatim's* [her husband] *lawyer I cut my hair short – Hatim can't see me anyway, so it does not matter what I look like or how I appear.*"

Speaking with her about her frustration she said "*It is not a loss, it is something else. It is living without my soul mate. We used to share everything but then I suddenly lost him, there is something missing in my life. No, it is not a loss, because loss is a negative thing, whereas missing someone is more romantic. And he does not want me to be lost. And I do not accept to have the feeling of loss in my life, because he has to be with me. Whenever there are important decisions around our new house, I postpone them until Hatim will be out of prison.*" Naima's frustration discloses the ambiguity of loss, absence, and not least the way in which temporality marks out the different spheres. Since Hatim is not dead, she has not lost him, yet her feelings of missing him are not merely romantic longing and desire. I suggest that we can think of her husband's absence, not only as a temporal suspension of his material presence in her life, but a suspension that does not make him as absent as a loss proper would. At a first glance, Victor Turner's (1967; 1974; 1986) term of liminality seems appropriate in emphasizing the temporal suspension of social being. However, as I will elaborate on below, the concept of liminality only goes some way in capturing the situation of the wives of detainees.

Ambiguous Absence

Moving away from the micro– and intimate level of gravely but invisibly distorted everyday lives of the detainees' families, I will discuss how to think more generally about absence, loss, and presence in the Palestinian context. For that purpose, I suggest we retrieve some of the introducing reflections of this book, aided by Runia's thoughts on presence (Runia 2006a; 2006b; 2007).

Runia argues that presence is not that which figures directly in a narrated story. Rather, presence can be conceived of as that which comes along as the stowaway (2006b: 1). Presence is difficult to access because of how it coincides with one of our blind spots – namely culture (ibid). This is significant here because apart from speaking about seemingly specific issues of loss and notions of suffering, victimhood and lives that get lost in the slipstream of these notions, the situations, the lives, and experiences I have described are not exceptions to the rule. Rather, these lives are molded not only by the violence of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict but through embedded structural relations between men and women.

By looking at these structural relations, it becomes clear that ideas of social presence are highly gendered. This was apparent in the situation of the wives of detainees against the backdrop of widows of martyrs. However, before the described women came to inhabit these categories, they were Palestinian women. And, in the occupied territories, women's presence, if not existence, is defined by the presence or absence of the men in their lives, depending on who at any point in time, is the primary, male relation to a woman. Understanding this social fact I draw on Suad Joseph's idea of "patriarchal connectivity" (Joseph 1999). Joseph suggests that the Western notion of self is ill at use in Middle Eastern countries because the ideal self in Arab societies is not a bounded unitary individual but rather a relational person, organized as patriarchal, with less than stable borders between self and other.

In the context of this paper's analysis of women related in different ways to heroic men, the patriarchal relationality can be inferred from the fact that the term used to designate these women was not "widow" but *zogat as-shahid* or *zogat al-azeer,* which means wife of martyr and wife of detainee, respectively. In the women's own speech, the issue of relationality figures in the way in which the women most often refer to themselves with the use of *wadi'* instead of *ana*, which refers to "my situation" (as married to detainee or martyr) instead of "I." However, patriarchal connectivity as a structuring principle pertains not only to the women in question, but equally to all women in Palestine.

The circumstances diverge between martyrs' widows and detainees' wives when it comes to the issue of the absence of a husband. When absence comes in the form of a permanent loss, it is different from when it is an allegedly temporary absence, with a duration equal to the prison sentence. This is partly because it is acknowledged that when a man dies, his family and his wife experience a loss. Consequently, because a widow to a martyr has derivatively sacrificed her own life through her husband's sacrifice of his life for a bigger cause, her loss is recognized. In this respect, religion plays a most salient part because of the meaningful frame of interpretation, justification, and legitimization of loss that their practice of Islam allows

(Allen 2006; Schulz 2003). Compared to the detainees' wives, to lose a husband in a way that complies with available religious parameters of meaning surrounding such a loss is, in fact, a gain. Of course, whether this applies on an emotional level varies from woman to woman, but socially losing a son, a father, or a husband to martyrdom is in official discourse considered to be honorable. It is a loss that has a designated place in culture and therefore makes sense, implying that the widow also inhabits such a place of recognition. This does not exempt the martyrs' widows from facing many of the same issues of public gossip, speculation, and surveillance, as do detainees' wives. But the acknowledgement of martyr's widows and their affliction, I suggest, has to do with the transformation in their social status that occurs when their husband dies, a transformation that through their close relation to the martyr places them nearer to the top in a hierarchy of people who have sacrificed their lives for the national struggle and for their faith.

Attempting to understand why such a hierarchization of suffering renders less recognition of the affliction of detainees' wives necessitates a return to temporality in relation to loss or absence. For the martyr's widows, their transformation in social status and the durability of their loss is permanent. The chapters of the widows' lives as wives are closed off and whatever remains of the husband/martyr's personal belongings and memorabilia ensures his eternal presence but, significantly, in a new chapter in their lives.

Detainees' wives, by contrast, live with an absence that is thought to be temporary, irrespective of the fact that it may last for the rest of the women's lives. Because of the hope that with a peace agreement with Israel, all the political detainees will be released, the issue of captivity remains within the realm of the temporary, no matter how many life sentences the detainees in question have been handed. Because of that, and due to the latent hope of a successful negotiation of "the detainees' question" with Israel, the absence of the detained husband is thought of as a pause, and therefore not as something that is perceived to cause the same permanent transformation as when a husband dies. We saw the ambiguity of this issue of losing versus missing in Naima's comments about the issue. Part of the ambiguity resides with the fact that a woman married to a detainee's social status is not supposed to change, or if it does, it does so allegedly to the better because of the honor of being married to a hero. Despite of this, nothing stays the same; the women's social status does change. From being treated as respectable housewives, the women become suspended between being married and yet dangerous and unrestrained because their husband is not there. This ambiguity or permanent limbo of their status brought about by their husbands' absence is what makes them slippery objects to handle for society, resulting in their being treated as if nothing and yet everything at the same time has changed regarding the women's presence in a social context. In contrast to such an ambiguous presence, a presence that is derived from the incarceration of their husbands, the widows to martyrs become something in their own right, namely widows, because of their loss and because of the absolute value of that very loss, namely a martyr who has sacrificed his life for Palestine.

The difference between the significance of a loss proper and a temporal absence is therefore due to the fact that absence of a detainee husband does not enter the

realm of a loss proper, and thus the wives of these prisoners remain ambiguous. Whether a sentence reads 19 years in an Israeli prison or lifetime plus some, for the wife, her kin, neighbours, and villagers, this is not felt as an imprisonment with a definite end. This endlessness, however, rests on something else than the actual duration of the sentence: The indefinite absence and the way it defies categorization is entwined in cultural ideals pertaining to Palestinian women.

The situation of detainees' wives slips from the places of cultural recognition of sacrifice or loss, exactly because what they are living through is considered neither a loss nor a sacrifice. In the equation of the lives of the detainees' wives, the ones recognized as suffering the most are the detainees themselves. Significantly though, I noted earlier that the detainees themselves are also potentially ambiguous figures, even if perhaps not to the same degree as their wives. Ambiguity then can be said to unsettle the validity of a public, well-known discourse about relatives to detainees as subjects who gain in social status and honor derivatively through the acts of their relatives. In a sense, the double ambiguity of the wives of detainees is molded through how the wives' social presence is derived from the absence of their detainee husbands. The potential ambiguity, intrinsic to the figure of the detainee, seeps into this derivative presence of the detainee's wife.

Nonetheless, it is beyond doubt that the women, whether widows or married to detainees, are honored in their own perception and in the eyes of their social relations because of their men's activities. The concern of the chapter has been to point to some of the blind spots produced in the slipstream of such national discourses of honor, heroism, and derivative pride.

If we look beyond the intangible loss or material absence that detainees' wives live with indefinitely, we see that Palestinian culture is not the only place in which they do not have a presence. As stowaways to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict the detainees' wives are neither bereaved, nor have they lost, they are neither imprisoned, nor tortured or traumatized in the literal sense. However, these proxies are what the Western based or funded organizations set up as criteria for recognition of victimhood and suffering. Palestinian wives of detainees fail every single one of these proxies, and in that sense their presence in Palestinian society as well as in international psycho-social discourse is merely derivative, and in a hierarchy of sufferers they occupy a blind spot. For these women, derivative presence and secondary victimization merge and form lives at the margins of social visibility.

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