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## SINCERITY, HYPOCRISY, AND CONSPIRACY THEORY IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

### **Abstract**

Concerns about lying and sincerity in politics are common in most societies, as are concerns about conspiracy theories. But in the occupied Palestinian territory, these concerns give rise to particular kinds of effects because of the conditions of Israeli occupation. Political theorists often interpret opacity claims and conspiracy theories as responses to social disorder. In occupied Palestine, disorder and instability are standard. Opacity claims and conspiracy theories therefore require a different kind of analysis. Through an examination of the semiotic ideology of sincerity, especially as it has emerged in the conflict between Fatah and Hamas, this article argues that opacity claims act as a form of nationalist pedagogy, at once reinforcing the basic principles of sincerity of action and word, and encouraging a wariness of political spin.

**Keywords:** conspiracy theory; ethics; Fatah; Hamas; occupied Palestinian territory

Hypocrisy seems inherent to politics. And the conviction that most politicians are duplicitous is as universally shared a belief as there may be.<sup>1</sup> This belief finds its most elaborate form in conspiracy theories, which also appear throughout history and across the globe. Although many are critical of the negative effects of this kind of cynical thinking and hypocrisy, political philosophers have recognized that hypocrisy itself may serve some slight positive function. For in pretending to be good, hypocrites may be a bit better than if they wore no mask of virtue. Political theorist Judith Shklar has suggested that, in condemning hypocrites, antihypocrites may scare politicians into improving their behavior.<sup>2</sup> But the nature of political hypocrisy, the widespread fears of and beliefs in political conspiracy, and the effects that accusations of political lying have on a society and its political relations are clearly variable.<sup>3</sup>

The case of the occupied Palestinian territory shows the limitations of universalizing theories of political philosophy. In a place where disruption, arbitrariness, violence, and extreme disempowerment have become the norm, the effects of antihypocritical discourse have come to produce both more and less than the mild disciplining of politicians that Shklar halfheartedly recognized. This article details how notions of hypocrisy, ideas about sincerity, and suspicions of conspiracy shape political engagement among Palestinians. I argue that talk of lying, sincerity, and conspiracy in occupied Palestine

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ultimately express concerns about social bonds and social solidarity, and convey lessons about whether and who to trust, with whom to have solidarity, and whom to believe and rely on.

My understanding of these dynamics is based on years of fieldwork conducted primarily in the West Bank over the last two decades. I draw on my interviews with people from both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip who are of a variety of political persuasions and socioeconomic backgrounds. I also analyze Arabic media that circulates throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. Especially since the beginning of the second intifada in 2000, I have observed a consistency in antihypocrisy discourse, through which Palestinians share their analyses of political talk and action, and evaluate each others' intentions and actions. This kind of discourse about (in)sincerity, which is ubiquitous, is a means of asserting shared values. It manifests a common habit of critical thought toward the political realm that can act as a shield against demagoguery and dictatorship. It also provides a language for political point scoring against internal rivals, and reveals the fragility of a national movement that has failed to attain its goal of full statehood and genuine independence. But most of all, in demanding sincerity from their own politicians, Palestinians reassert the principle that political character, conviction, and action should be unitary, that nationalist word and deed should be sincere.

Political skepticism and conspiracy theorizing in the occupied Palestinian territory are not products of "Middle Eastern culture," as some (such as Daniel Pipes) have claimed.<sup>4</sup> Rather they are a result of the insecurities and uncertainties of life under military occupation, in which those Palestinians with the most power within the broad framework of Israeli control are most shielded from scrutiny. The way in which the 1993 Oslo Accords were developed in secret and to the detriment of most Palestinians, and the desultory performance of the Palestinian Authority since then, have also fueled a widespread sense among Palestinians that hypocrisy and insincerity are the default positions of politicians. The long-running power struggle between the two main nationalist factions, Fatah and Hamas, which has split the occupied territory and the Palestinian Authority since 2007, has greatly deepened Palestinians' cynicism and suspicion towards politics. So much so, in fact, that it threatens to undermine the expectation of sincerity in politics, and to unravel the framework of values in which the national movement was based for well over half a century.

#### HAMAS VERSUS FATAH: RATS AND HYENAS AGAINST TREACHERY AND DUPLICITY

The Palestinian national movement has always been dynamic, the product of multiple, sometimes contesting forces and interests. The 1980s experienced one of the movement's biggest challenges with the PLO's expulsion from Lebanon.<sup>5</sup> The politicization and popularity of the Palestinian Islamist movement grew in the context of this crisis.<sup>6</sup> After the establishment of Hamas during the first intifada, the Islamist movement's influence expanded. From the beginning, the relationship between it and the secular nationalism of the PLO was characterized by competition. The more that Fatah, the major political party in the PLO, moved towards some kind of accommodation with Israel, the more bitter the internal Palestinian conflict became. The surprising victory of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections intensified the rivalry.



FIGURE 1. (Color online) Still from a cartoon depicting Hamas as a lion seated between the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>7</sup>

Partially an outcome of the elections, the enmity between Hamas and Fatah took on a new character in the summer of 2007, when brutal confrontations between the two parties broke out and left over one hundred dead—with several men having been thrown off rooftops—and 1,000 wounded in the Gaza Strip. Among the wounded, many were hurt in particularly violent ways apparently intended to cause maximum pain.<sup>8</sup> Since then, Hamas has governed Gaza, while Fatah continues to rule the West Bank. The political and physical separation of these two parts of the occupied Palestinian territory has remained entrenched.

The acrimonious competition between the two camps has been evident in the policies each has pursued, such as the exclusion from government of those affiliated with the opposing party, and the repression of their activities within civil society.<sup>9</sup> It has also played out in news and party-affiliated media, where each side accuses the other of antinationalist behavior and secret plots and plans.<sup>10</sup> Within this bitter exchange of denunciation and countercondemnation, a shared semiotic ideology—the culturally relevant and generally shared ideas about how words, language, and meaning should function—is evident.<sup>11</sup> Sincerity is at the core of this semiotic ideology, and serves as a fundamental principle undergirding the ethical structure of Palestinian politics.<sup>12</sup>

The Fatah–Hamas rivalry played out in two dueling animated videos that were circulated on the Internet in 2008. These videos exemplify the shared perception among these political contestants that duplicity is tantamount to antinationalism. A Hamas cartoon entitled “Hamas and the Treachery of Fatah” expressed the view that Fatah is corrupt and indecent, using the guns of nationalist fighters to oppress and swindle its own people.<sup>13</sup> It depicts Fatah as a bunch of armed rats led by a cigar-smoking Muhammad Dahlan, the Fatah strongman in Gaza who was accused of collaborating with the CIA to orchestrate a failed coup to topple Hamas there.<sup>14</sup> At the end of the cartoon, a calm, sage lion representing Hamas stomps on the fearful rats who scuttle away. With the Fatah rodents cleared, the scorched earth sprouts green anew (Fig. 1).

An animated video that Fatah produced in response, entitled “The True Face of Hamas,” begins with the text, “Removing the mask from the hyenas’ faces: the true face of the Hamas movement,” as ominous music plays in the background.<sup>15</sup> As the video proceeds the lion representing Hamas roars and its outer skin splits down the middle, exposing a psychotically laughing hyena. Terrorizing children and stealing their food,



FIGURE 2. (Color online) Still from a Fatah YouTube video depicting Hamas.<sup>16</sup>

the evil-looking animal moves through the streets of Gaza, lights going out as it passes. It tears up the flag of national unity as it heads to the West Bank. The video resonates with Palestinian folklore and mythology, in which hyenas are portrayed as malicious tricksters, capable of hypnotizing people to make them follow.<sup>17</sup> At the end of the Fatah video, the hyena, after wreaking this path of destruction, returns to its lion mask, its green, flaming eyes glowing through (Fig. 2).

Hypnotizing duplicity, sparkling slogans hiding a bleaker reality, monstrous hyenas in lion's clothing: these condemnations are not merely utilitarian, partisan attempts to discredit the competition (although certainly they are partially that). In the contests of representation between Hamas and Fatah there is also an implicit exhortation for sincerity in politics. Such representations are examples of how national values, standards of political ethics, and the meaning of Palestinian identity are continually reaffirmed, even as faith in the people who are supposed to enact these values erodes with the growing evidence that they are not maintaining them in practice.

#### SINCERITY AND SEMANTIC IDEOLOGY

As revealed in these animations and other media circulating in the occupied Palestinian territory, there is a broad concern that words should be sincere (*ṣādiqa* or *mukhliṣa*), that they reveal an honesty of intention and express a correlation of word and action. Sincerity is at the core of Palestinian semiotic ideology, evaluative ideas about how things represent other things.

Any semiotic ideology encompasses ideas about what kind of moral subject uses language in particular ways. These ideas are the substrate for value judgments that people make about each other as individuals or groups. Understanding semiotic ideology is therefore key to understanding an ethical system, the standards by which people evaluate their own and others' behaviors and dispositions as good or bad, right or wrong. Attention to semiotic ideology and ethics also provides insights into what animates conflict and forms the glue of political allegiances. It sheds light on ideas about what political actors

are and should be, about how political actors should act and talk. Semiotic ideology in Palestine is a part of nationalist ideology. Nationalist ideology frames ideas of who the moral subject is, and nationalism sets the parameters against which the ways people speak are gauged.

In Palestine, according to nationalist ideology, people should be willing to sacrifice themselves for a greater social, national good, in solidarity with conationals and guided by nationalist and pure intentions. Individuals express themselves, judge, and are judged within that normative, idealistic framework. But once they are in the realm of politics, actors are more often regarded as amoral, individualistic, and power seeking. The rodents, lions, and hyenas of the sparring videos illustrate the shared concern with duplicity in the political realm, especially the duplicity of political elites (such as Dahlan).

If sincerity and related values have not been consistently enacted in the occupied Palestinian territory, there is still a common concern there about sincerity of word and deed. This concern has remained a predominant theme of discourse related to the inter-factional battle between Hamas and Fatah. The value of sincerity at play in the Palestinian political realm is akin to the linguistic ideology that anthropologist Summerson Carr has termed “the ideology of inner reference,” or “an ideology that presumes that (1) ‘healthy’ language refers to preexisting phenomena, and (2) the phenomena to which it refers are internal to speakers.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, this ideology holds that people have true feelings and beliefs in their inner self and consciousness, and that when language and speakers are functioning properly (according to this value system, or ideology), people put those inner states into words that refer directly and transparently to them. Language does not produce or have an effect on those states, it simply expresses them.

The predominant semiotic ideology in Palestinian politics shapes worries about how representations reflect aims, whether actions accord with pronouncements, how words reveal inner intentions, and how words indicate what kind of person has uttered them.<sup>19</sup> This ideology is marked by a concern with transparency and opacity, with determining which words and actions are true and substantive or duplicitous and empty.<sup>20</sup> The shared focus on sincerity among Palestinians, and their critique of opacity and duplicity, indicates that, even amidst the violent melee and bitter divisions, they possess a shared clutch of ideals.

#### OPACITY AND CONSPIRACY UNDER OCCUPATION

These shared ideals, often expressed in “opacity claims” about lying, sincerity, and conspiracy, all relate to a belief “that it is impossible to know what is in the mind of another person,” but that what is in the other’s mind should be reflected directly in the person’s words and actions.<sup>21</sup> Conspiracy theories are a particular kind of opacity claim. Conspiracy is generally defined as harmful action enacted deliberately and through secret planning. Scholars often analyze conspiracy theories in isolation from the broader context of opacity claims and without reference to the regnant semiotic ideology. They do not view them in tandem with the ways that people in a society think about how representations work or should work. But their insights into the functions and effects of conspiracy theory can shed light on semiotic ideology and political ethics more broadly.

Scholarly attempts to understand the role of conspiracy in politics and society are diverse and far ranging.<sup>22</sup> Anthropologists have interpreted conspiracy talk as a form of

resistance and a means of popular empowerment, a method of ethical critique, or a means of sustaining a “transnational imagined community” that paradoxically legitimates state power.<sup>23</sup> They note the prevalence of conspiracies in contexts where political decision making is very hierarchical and have analyzed indictments of politicians’ duplicity as being a means of challenging elites, and of understanding “the invisible workings of the global marketplace.”<sup>24</sup> Some scholars argue that the ironic stance that is typical of postmodernism leads to conspiracy theories, while others identify Christianity or Puritanism as sources for mass worry about duplicity and the fetishization of sincerity.<sup>25</sup>

It could be that conspiracy theorizing is a universal human penchant and that the tendency to equate politics with lying is transhistorical, but their prompts, purposes, and results can only be identified by considering their specific historical, political, and social contexts. Indeed, most anthropologists insist that the stimuli for conspiracy talk and opacity preoccupations are varied and specific, as are the social and political functions that they serve.<sup>26</sup> While ethnographic examinations highlight the apparently “nonscientific” and distinctive ways that people try to make sense of a world full of extreme disempowerment and violence, their basic goal is to grasp the underlying logic by which, in context, these seemingly paranoid perspectives make sense.<sup>27</sup>

The anthropological approach, which draws attention to the situations in which certain beliefs about duplicity and opacity emerge, stands in contrast to that of some political philosophers. Ignoring the particulars of specific contexts, Hannah Arendt, for example, believed that conspiracy theories are based on assumptions that the world is somehow ordered and orderly, and result from “reason’s aversion to contingency.”<sup>28</sup> They emerge, in this view, from the need of “the masses” for consistency.<sup>29</sup> Political lies are efficacious and accepted, she argues, because so often they can make the world seem more sensible and reasonable than does the truth.

For Palestinians who have lived only under the arbitrary rule of military occupation, however, it is most reasonable to expect disruption. For people whose routines are regularly obstructed, but in completely arbitrary and nontransparent ways, the only constant in daily life is lack of consistency.<sup>30</sup> So if a hankering for reasonableness is universal, but one that is not experienced the same way everywhere, how does this affect our understanding of the nature and function of political lies and conspiracy talk? In what follows I offer some examples of how and why people living under Israeli occupation expect a certain level of uncertainty and duplicity as a norm. Israel’s arbitrarily imposed and overwhelming physical control of the occupied Palestinian territory and its use of collaborators are key reasons. I go on to show how public assessments of others’ (in)sincerity, and attempts to make sense of and see beneath duplicity, are also continuous features of life under occupation. In the context of the occupied Palestinian territory, Israel’s pervasive, but capricious control incubates a widespread wariness and political suspicion.

Opacity has a particular significance for Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. Those who govern the occupation make decisions behind closed doors, and those who control many aspects of daily life do so seemingly arbitrarily. Even the normal travels of daily life—from town to town, from job to home—may be disrupted without warning or reason. The Israeli army erects “flying checkpoints,” for example, which are temporary and erratically placed. During the height of the second intifada, the haphazard nature of the blocks, and the randomness with which they were erected or monitored, kept

Palestinians in a constant state of uncertainty. The occupation makes seizure and destruction of property an ever-present threat that is unpredictably implemented. As is the seizure of person. For those subject to a justice system in which administrative detention can leave one in prison without stated reason, charge, or trial, reasonableness may be universally preferred, but is hardly the expectation that Arendt believed to be universal.<sup>31</sup> The only real constant in daily life is inconsistency.<sup>32</sup>

Pressure to collaborate and actual collaborators penetrate and seep into everyday life under occupation. Israel has relied heavily on coopting Palestinians to work with them, especially as spies who provide information to facilitate the assassination or arrest of other Palestinians by Israeli forces. Israel recruits Palestinians into this role through extortion, threat, and trickery. In Israeli jails, collaborators extract unwilling confessions from unwitting prisoners. Outside of prison, Israel demands information from ill Palestinians seeking permits to get health care abroad.<sup>33</sup> The widespread knowledge of Israel's power to coerce, and the frequency with which Israel assassinates wanted Palestinians based on inside intelligence, means that the prevalence of collaborators is a well-known fact among Palestinians. As one Palestinian civil society activist declared, "We are an infiltrated society."<sup>34</sup>

In everyday life under occupation, local mysteries are profusely speculated upon, and the hypotheses generated to explain them often involve the controlling hand of the Israeli occupation authorities. Because the decision makers who govern the occupation are almost entirely inaccessible to Palestinians, and because they are in fact involved in manipulating people in secret ways, such as through the deployment of collaborators and undercover agents, it is perfectly logical and reasonable to suspect or assume the occupation's involvement in mysterious happenings.<sup>35</sup> During my fieldwork in the West Bank, several perplexing neighborhood events were discussed in this way. There were questions, hypotheses, and presumptions about who broke in to a youth center, who spread scandalous rumors about an aerobics class in a refugee camp, why a random youth suddenly attacked his neighbor, and why someone swiftly received a rare permit to travel out of the country. For my interlocutors, possible explanations for some of these events included the occupation's deployment of collaborators sent to disrupt the empowering social and educational activities of civic activists. Given that actual conspiracies are inherent to the occupation, such explanations were as likely as any other.

Being forced to live under a wholly nontransparent, seemingly erratic regime of a foreign military power has produced a generalized wariness among Palestinians marked by unique kinds of expectations about access to the truth, and unique assumptions about how the world is being organized. The right to health care or the right to reside with one's family can be revoked based on arbitrary, secret grounds that cannot be appealed.<sup>36</sup> Arrest and imprisonment can happen on the basis of secret evidence.<sup>37</sup> Palestinians living under occupation are acclimatized to, although not accepting of, the inconsistencies and whims of an oppressive system.<sup>38</sup> Their attitudes towards political power, political discourse, and the possibilities of opacity and likelihood of conspiracy are thus distinctive. The unwillingness to accept the declarations of, or expect the truth from, those in power has been ingrained through the experience of almost five decades of radical contingency and capricious power. What politicians and the powerful really mean and what they are actually doing behind closed doors is always a cipher, understood to be nontransparent, a mystery to be unraveled, potentially if not already malicious in intent and effect.

## CONSPIRACY THEORY AS NATIONAL BOND

The national enemy—the Israeli military authority—cannot be trusted, and its plans, actions, and intentions can neither be known for certain nor reliably predicted. The view among Palestinians that lying and obfuscation are part of what the occupiers do has been extended to their view of their own rulers, the Palestinian Authority, as well as political factions. Many Palestinians consider the Palestinian Authority to be untrustworthy. Thus, the political entity that came into being after the Oslo Peace Accords of 1993 and that is supposed to incarnate Palestinian nationalism, is seen to be full of craven compradors clinging to whatever privileges they can at the expense of the national good.<sup>39</sup>

Such analyses, discussions, and judgments occur all the time in public discourse, news media, and everyday conversation. Political discussion is a fact of everyday life, involving young and old, teachers and taxi drivers, activists and observers. Speech and the inner intentions it conveys or obscures, actions and the claimed or true motives that drive them, the workings of the powerful and the secret or revealed plans they are implementing—these are all subjects of public and private analysis in the occupied territory. Sometimes the extent of such discussion increases.

As the ethnographic record shows, conspiracy talk arises and the volume of opacity claims increases during periods of social upset.<sup>40</sup> Whether by war, assassination, revolution, or large-scale changes in economic structures, interruptions to the ebb and flow of normal relations tend to produce a need in people to make sense of their new conditions by pulling back veils and seeking out what really underlies things.<sup>41</sup> When people perceive their conditions as negative, catastrophic to a way of life, or almost beyond imagination, anxiety about understanding and believing others is expressed in opacity claims.<sup>42</sup>

The fighting between Hamas and Fatah in 2007 provoked an intensity of opacity claims. The violence of the conflict and the extent to which it contrasted with previous phases of in-fighting marked it as particularly acute. During the internal clashes of 1983 between PLO and anti-Arafat forces in Lebanon, for example, the fighting was bitter but never went beyond “ordinary” battles and some assassinations by “conventional” means (guns, bombs). In the wake of the Hamas takeover of Gaza, few could recall internal violence between these adversaries reaching such a personalized level of sadism. It was thus a period in which values were intensively assessed and reasserted. Crises can provoke conspiracy talk and opacity concerns because of a perceived moral breakdown in society, but they also can precipitate a time of collective moral or political contemplation, when principles of right living become an explicit focus.<sup>43</sup> The Hamas–Fatah fighting prompted an unusual number of opacity claims because it was such a stark shattering of any pretence to national unity, and such a blatant violation of the (rarely written but often stated) Palestinian prohibition (*tahrīm*) on shedding Palestinian blood.<sup>44</sup>

During their takeover of the Gaza Strip, Hamas forces killed tens of Fatah-associated members of the PA security services. Among the Fatah-associated members of the PA who were in Gaza at the time and survived, many left with severe and disabling injuries. Some had one or both legs amputated after being shot in the knees at point blank range by members of Hamas’s Executive Force.<sup>45</sup> One survivor from Gaza explained the resulting social rupture to me by suggesting that the Hamas leadership gave their members drugs that allowed them to kill for twenty-four hours straight. I sat with this



young man, an amputee in a wheelchair, in the cafeteria of the rehabilitation center where approximately twenty of the men who had found refuge in the West Bank were receiving treatment. I expressed my doubts about this theory, but he and the other disabled young men who were gathered around the table insisted it was true. What else could explain the venomous fury and brutal violence with which Hamas members acted?

Whether or not Hamas fueled their fighters in this way, the theory contains a number of insights. It is a moral condemnation of the Hamas leadership, which is seen to be capable of exploiting people and manipulating them with illegal substances that are generally believed to be immoral, if not religiously forbidden. It implies a deplorable level of hypocrisy on the part of Hamas, given the group's religious roots and reputation for uncorrupt behavior. It also signals the extent to which Hamas's violence was perceived to be truly excessive and shocking.

The belief that the Hamas leadership was tricking its fighters into inhumane acts was a certain kind of conspiracy theory. However, unlike most conspiracy theories, in which "ordinary people may articulate their concerns that others, in possession of extraordinary powers, see and act decisively in realms normally concealed from view," part of the focus in this story is the powerless: Palestinians duped by the Hamas leadership in Gaza.<sup>46</sup> For the Palestinians who held this theory, which circulated beyond these injured Gazans, it was only unnatural circumstances or foreign substances that could explain this inhuman behavior. Such explanations of the national split are a form of popular political theory and ethical commentary. They reflect a mass sentiment that Palestinian nationalist politics is faulty, and that the political elite is to blame.

Many social analysts understand conspiracy theories as being symptomatic of an age in which knowledge that is perceived to be necessary, or that should be available, is hidden and controlled by those in power. Conspiracy theories are an expression of the human will to order and understand in conditions of social and political alienation. Anthropologist Dominic Boyer has pronounced them to be "a therapeutic mode of sheltering a positive sense of selfhood in the shadow of a dread historical burden."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, conspiracy theories during the American Revolution have been described as rationalizations allowing people to hold on to the belief that "events are the conscious consequence of specific intentions and efficacious wills" rather than chaotic contingency.<sup>48</sup>

Conspiracy theory in Palestine, however, is not merely an index of some psychological state or an expression of fears about chaos. It also performs productive political work.<sup>49</sup> West Bank accounts of the conflict in Gaza suggest that the world is not as it should be, and confirm a moral ideal in the process. This dysfunction that the conflict represents is seen to be rooted as much in the goodness of the *busaṭā'* (simple people, sing. *basīṭ*) as in the maliciousness of the manipulators. Conspiracy theory is also moral theory.

The quality of being simple, which is how Palestinians in the West Bank regularly describe Gazans, is often considered a positive attribute in Palestinian society. Time and again, West Bankers told me that "simple people," those perceived to be uneducated, unsophisticated, easily persuaded, especially in isolated Gaza, were being duped by Hamas politicians. Even if the label implies a sense of West Bank superiority, West Bankers use the word *basīṭ* to describe someone who is simple in a good-hearted way. Someone who is *basīṭ* is not necessarily simple minded, but rather, innocently straightforward, never scheming. It is just that transparency, that concordance of intent, action, and belief, which those who have lost faith in politics see as deficient in politicians. They

accuse both factions of lacking sincerity. What the West Bank discourse about Gaza does have in common with other attempts to comprehend power through conspiracy theory is the presumption that there is a “*surface* to power that can be seen through and an *interior* that can, as a result, be seen.”<sup>50</sup> Conspiracy theory conveys an ideal of sincerity, reinforcing a moral preference for political action in which the surface action and words are transparent and accord with interior intent.

#### SINCERITY: CONFORMITY OF FORM AND CONTENT

Although the Fatah– Hamas conflict was a popular topic in Palestine around the time of the “coup” in 2007, conversations about insincerity had already been common throughout the second intifada, which began in 2000. Everyone I knew supported the active opposition to the Israeli occupation that the intifada represented, but debates about the best means for doing this were continuous, and they highlighted the importance of sincerity in Palestinian politics. These deliberations were partly prompted by the highly controversial deployment of suicide bombings against Israeli civilians inside the Green Line.<sup>51</sup> The militarization of the intifada was under scrutiny. Among the major concerns were issues of morality, military impact, and political effectiveness. Questions about the nationalist sincerity of the uprising’s participants also spread.

Some rejected how the nationalist zeal of some of its participants was being expressed, dismissing it as *tāfih* (superficial, silly). When I asked my closest interlocutors, men who had been leaders during the first intifada and were now keeping to the sidelines, about the goals and motivations of the second intifada’s militants who shot at tanks with rifles, they derided them for being more interested in showing off (*istiʿrād*) with their guns than actually putting them to effective use in resisting the occupation. They surmised that while the gunmen pretended to be stirred by nationalist commitment, some of these men were motivated more by the hope for personal gain than collective liberation. Men hiding behind the guise of “nationalist militant struggler” (*munāḍil*) were involved in making money off of gun running, I was told, or using threats of violence in protection rackets that targeted Palestinian shopkeepers. Whether as a member of Hamas, Fatah, or any other faction, a fighter who used his gun for individual profit was engaged in self-serving behavior that ran counter to nationalist ideals of self sacrifice.<sup>52</sup> A political leader’s words of praise for a political activist killed by Israel illustrated the converse. Admiring the martyr’s generosity, he emphasized that he was a “defiant fighter . . . and an eloquent orator whose deeds matched his words.”<sup>53</sup>

#### HAMAS VERSUS FATAH

The self-serving actions of political officials was also a common target of criticism. Hamas-affiliated legislators accused the West Bank government of lying about budgets for the personal gain of individual members, and Fatah members accused the Hamas government in Gaza of hatching secret plans to “liberate” Gaza and unite it with Egypt.<sup>54</sup> Although obviously a means of political contest, these exchanges, and specifically their emphasis on deceitful surfaces hiding inner malevolent intention, are just as much a form of political pedagogy as they are rhetorical barbs. With every denunciation of what is improper in a political foe, with every reference made to lies circulated in news media,

ideas about what is correct behavior are reinforced and the audience is reminded of the importance of being wary of false promises and pronouncements.<sup>55</sup>

Those affiliated with Hamas regularly point to the insincerity of Fatah and the PA, and to the problem of being deceived and exploited by those who wear a nationalist façade that hides ulterior motives. In one instance discussed in an article posted on the Hamas-leaning news site *al-Risala* (The Message), a festival organized by a Fatah organization for the mothers of political prisoners, ostensibly to show support for them and their imprisoned sons, was revealed to be a sham. The article reports that when the women arrived carrying photographs of their sons, they discovered the event was being staged for a film, and they felt deceived. “We became nothing but advertising material for a film,” one of the mothers complained. So the women left, lest they “become a mere device for petty amusement in someone’s hand.”<sup>56</sup>

While in this case the filming was literal, the Arabized English verb of “to film” is also used metaphorically to indicate a genre of not telling the truth—it is a euphemism for lying. To say that someone has *filim ‘alayk* or *bi-yisawī filim* (do a film on you, make a film) means that he has told an untrue story, has “pulled one over on you,” is making something up in order to deceive. In the *al-Risala* article, the author accuses Fatah of trying to pull something over on the mothers of political prisoners, a particularly egregious offense given their importance as nationalist icons in Palestine.<sup>57</sup> The nationalist form of this ceremony, complete with mothers holding the photos of the absent nationalist heroes, betrayed a different, propagandistic intent, the article suggests, threatening to make those who have sacrificed their sons and their freedom for Palestine into a laughing stock.

Beyond the dishonorable exploitation of these women, the public denunciation focused on the Fatah club’s aestheticization of politics, what historian Martin Jay usefully glosses as “the domination of rhetorical or figural over literal and sincere modes of speech.”<sup>58</sup> In Palestinian public discourse there is a constant effort to push back against any attempt to let politics be turned into a public relations exercise, to ensure that the images floating in front of citizens match the reality of actions and intentions behind the scenes, and to call attention to the gap between the two.

The importance of the form–content distinction in Palestinian linguistic ideology is most expressively captured in the Palestinian colloquial phrases *ḥakī fādī*, empty talk, and *kalām fī al-hawā’*, words in the air. The phrase *ḥakī fādī* refers to meaningless talk, words without substance. An idiomatic American English translation of *ḥakī fādī* might be “hot air.” Just as someone full of hot air may speak in a puffed up way of great exploits and promise grand things, someone whose talk is *ḥakī fādī* is easily dismissed, not to be taken seriously, because there is no reality or truth to what that person is saying. *Kalām fī al-hawā’*, like *ḥakī fādī*, are words so light that they can float away, making no difference in the world that they claim to represent or influence.

Anthropologist Amahl Bishara, commenting on a *New York Times* interview with a Palestinian child in the Gaza Strip, captured a perfect example of how such semiotic ideology functions in the context of political-ethical judgment. The *New York Times* journalist quoted the boy: “‘Peace,’ he said with scorn, ‘is a word that flies in the air.’” One of Bishara’s interlocutors interpreted the newspaper quote, saying: “I can imagine a fourteen-year-old boy talking . . . and saying ‘peace is just talk in the air’ . . . It means it is not tangible. All of them talk about peace, but for him, for the boy, it is all in the

air.”<sup>59</sup> As Bishara observed, “‘peace’ as a theoretical term had little currency for many Palestinians.”<sup>60</sup> It is a nice word promising great things. But many consider the so-called peace process to be just a farce. Peace has no reality on the ground.<sup>61</sup> This skepticism is a result of many years of periodic negotiations coming on the back of the vague and unfulfilled promises for sovereignty that the Oslo Accords offered, which have only seemed to buy time for Israel’s expanding settlement project.

Although any peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians has been unimaginable for most in the occupied Palestinian territory for years, various leaders have promised “peace” between Fatah and Hamas intermittently since 2007. There have been six formal reconciliation agreements (and one public reaffirmation of prior agreements) between the two parties, none of which has changed matters on the ground. How to restore trust between Fatah and Hamas, and whether or not the warring factions are sincere in their desire for reconciliation, have been frequently expressed concerns in public discourse.<sup>62</sup> Political analyses highlight the distinction between deceitful pretense and real, unified nationalism with “strong roots deep in the society.”<sup>63</sup> A commentator in *al-Risala* condemned the PA for exploiting unity as a slogan for the West Bank government’s own political purposes.<sup>64</sup> He warned against any attempt by PA members to ingratiate themselves with the people through “pretty slogans” and “glittering expressions” that have nothing to do with “reality.”

In contrast, Hamas has asserted about itself that there is “absolute correspondence between what we say and what we do,” as Hamas leader ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rantisi wrote in his memoirs.<sup>65</sup> As a result of this correspondence between intent and action, he continued, Hamas enjoys “high credibility and the people trust us.” A consistent feature of Hamas discourse is the contention that behind the words spoken by and visible actions of other political groups lies nefarious activity designed for the benefit of select individuals. Surface talk, whether pleasing or simply obfuscating, is a shell that members of Fatah and the PA use to manipulate the people while materially benefiting themselves as individuals. In one instance, Hamas member Hasan Khraysha, the second deputy speaker in the Legislative Council, accused the West Bank Palestinian Authority of trying to create the impression that the government was experiencing a financial crisis so that the population would expect fewer services.<sup>66</sup> He requested that the government in Ramallah communicate in a more “transparent” and straightforward manner the truth about the PA’s finances. And since the news station Al-Jazeera re-opened the question of how former Palestinian President Yasir Arafat died, with many believing that Israel had somehow poisoned him, Fatah and the PA have been accused of covering up the truth.<sup>67</sup> It would seem from Hamas rhetoric that the PA and Fatah are committing forms of deception, engaging in conspiracy everywhere.

#### MANY AGAINST HAMAS

Accusations that factional and individual interests are prioritized over the shared national good are just as prominent in Fatah’s criticisms of Hamas, which is decried for its subterfuge and maneuverings in pursuit of its own party-specific political gains.<sup>68</sup> The focus on the “true” inner ideology of Hamas underscores the accuser’s canny ability and, by extension, that of Fatah to look past the deceiving surface and see the “coup

mentality which is ‘nesting’ in the heads of the Hamas leaders.” At the same time, it serves to condemn Hamas for its duplicity (*izdiwājiyya*).<sup>69</sup>

In Fatah’s portrayals, the antinationalist behavior of Hamas is all the worse for the duplicitous forms it takes. Fatah has repeatedly charged Hamas with agreeing to a unity deal in public and then refusing to implement its side of the bargain.<sup>70</sup> Because “it is easy for them to make pronouncements in the morning and negate them in the evening,” Hamas has no credibility (*miṣḍāqiyya*).<sup>71</sup> Adam, a Palestinian General Intelligence officer in the West Bank whom I interviewed, invoked the Islamic term *taqiyya* (religiously validated dissimulation about one’s faith) to describe Hamas members’ willingness to lie unabashedly to protect themselves.<sup>72</sup> According to this line of argument, treachery and backstabbing characterize the Islamic Resistance Movement, which has “revealed its true self to be one of coups and selfishness.” Voicing a similar sense of vindicated suspicions, a Ramallah resident and Fatah loyalist talked to me about the Fatah party conference being held in Bethlehem in August 2009, which he told me Hamas was not permitting Fatah members from Gaza to attend. He said, “There is no national unity. It’s not religion or politics, but the seat of power. That’s all they are after. Hamas has exposed its true self.”

Beyond the partisan editorial pages there are civil society activists and observers from among the general public who are convinced that the way Hamas’s members speak publicly is different from how they actually think and “raise their people.” They believe that it is only within the Islamists’ inner circle that the truth of Hamas’s motives and plans resides. A self-identified secular Palestinian analyst of Islamism told me he was skeptical of the prospects for my research into Hamas: “Hamas are *bāṭiniyīn* [concealers, hidden].<sup>73</sup> You don’t know what they *really* believe and you won’t find out.” As an example he pointed to Hamas’s use of the language of human rights, which in his view they deployed merely to placate the west. He observed that it was only “when the US started talking about democracy, women’s rights, and human rights that Hamas complied with a similar response.” Human rights activists and others were equally suspicious of Hamas’s manipulations of liberal discourses and projects. One NGO director told me that he refused to work with Hamas on a boycott campaign against Israel, not only because Hamas is against the secular social agenda he personally supported, but also because their participation “would put a good face on Hamas.” He would have been helping them in a ruse, not in a sincere political effort.

Similar themes of insincerity on the surface and dangerous inner realities ran through the conversation I had with a Bethlehem-area preacher and former Hamas member, Shaykh Lau’ay. He talked with me about the movement and the violent confrontations between Hamas and Fatah.

The problem is with one who says, “I am Muslim and that is my frame of reference [*marja’iyyatī*].” But then there is a big gap between theory and behavior. I met a sample of Hamas leaders in [Israeli political] prison and I saw the contradictions between the speech I heard and reality. A person might speak the most beautiful words, and I’d see him behave in a totally different way. Hamas has no credibility. There is lying. The truth is lost. There are two kinds of development in a person: development in the style of speech, and development in thinking. Hamas has only the former. Meaning tactics and public relations. But in reality, their thinking is the same. Perhaps their structure of thought is incapable of change.

The shaykh and others in the Bethlehem area refugee camp where I met him condemned both the hypocrisy and the maliciousness that Hamas's "beautiful words" concealed. I received a similar response when I remarked to a friend, Nizar, about the effusiveness of the hospitality of two Hamas spokesmen I had just interviewed. They had been very friendly and made a show of sending someone out to get sweets to offer me. Nizar shook his head knowingly, rejecting my naïve appreciation of this cordial behavior. He had been in political prison with one of these men during the first intifada. "You should have seen him in prison," he said. "He was the most rageful, hateful one of them all. If you weren't Hamas, you were loathed." Nizar offered this experience as more evidence supporting his opinion of Hamas as lying and deceitful characters.

Palestinians are usually intensely wary of politicians and their untrustworthiness, and the performative effects of talk about sincerity in such a nationalist, but divisive, context are politically salient.<sup>74</sup> Given the ways in which the power of the Israeli military occupation is felt in Palestinians' everyday lives—arbitrary, erratic, and obscure—one who can see beyond the surface of others' speech and actions has a particular political value. The decriers who recognize the insincerity and fraudulence of a political contestant show themselves to be astute and, literally, insightful—able to see into the real, inner workings of another, and of others' political plans. Such critics also position themselves as channels giving access to the interiors of conationals, bringing secrets into the open light where national unity can develop on a truer basis. In this way, anyone who demands transparency and identifies what is obscured, anyone who reveals the dangerous gap between surface and content in others' politics, helps his or her conationals transcend the geographical, political, and even individual divisions that are a danger to nationalism and national solidarity. These powers and values are signaled through the message: "I know the inner truth of others and can help you understand, too."<sup>75</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

As the extent of the disputatious discourse I analyze here suggests, the Palestinian political arena is replete with critical thinkers who are in persistent debate about the meaning and parameters of their nation and national movement. I characterize them as critical thinkers because they continuously question each other's motives, probing why and how they resist the occupation. They challenge the claims of those who govern them, pushing back against the growing authoritarianism of the Palestinian Authority while expressing suspicion about the goals and methods of the political leadership.

This critical discourse is also a means of engaging in divisive party politics, of course, and sincerity talk and conspiracy theorizing do not always produce behavior directed toward the common national good. Nevertheless, the kinds of metadiscourse and talk about intention that I have analyzed here form a common language of political contestation. The semiotic ideology that underlies this discourse is a core feature of Palestinian nationalist ideology, and it reflects a set of shared representational and moral norms.

This much is obvious from reactions to the attempted reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas in June 2014, which generated some cautious hope that unity was a possibility, tempered by wariness that the attempt would prove merely cosmetic. Many Palestinians commented that the unity needed to be substantive, "not only a 'paper agreement'

between Hamas and Fatah.<sup>76</sup> By the summer of 2015, during my latest research visit to the West Bank, little hope was evident. Indeed, many Palestinians, especially younger ones, have turned away from politics altogether. One outside observer noted in 2010 that “neither Fatah nor Hamas is able to mobilize popular passions,” and this remains true six years later.<sup>77</sup> Among those who are still seeking to make a difference by opposing the occupation and trying to improve their own political systems, there was disdain for the traditional political parties.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout all of these forms of expression, from the everyday commentary to the op-eds and animated videos, there is a consistency of concern amidst the insults and accusations. The extent of the doubt expressed about others’ intentions could be read as a politically crippling generalized distrust. It could be a “peculiar form of cynicism—an absolute refusal to believe in the truth of anything” of the sort that Arendt diagnosed as being typical of totalitarian regimes. Systems such as these are so destructive, she grimly concluded, because they destroy “the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world. . . . And for this trouble there is no remedy.”<sup>79</sup>

But in the occupied Palestinian territory, conspiracy tales are a form of popular moral theory offering political lessons. Widespread attention to duplicity as expressed through opacity claims also reinforces shared principles of an ethical system, and encourages a constructive vigilance about political actors and political spin. In contrast to the American experience that Arendt and others described, Palestinians’ attention to moments of insincerity and their accusations of duplicity are a protest against the substitution of image making for policy. Instead of questioning the very possibility of truth, the epistemology of suspicion and circulation of conspiracy theories reinforce sincerity as the moral ideal and political touchstone against which words and deeds are appraised. That the national enemy is the greatest source of uncertainty and duplicity helps account for the resilience of the ideals of sincerity in the occupied Palestinian territory.

#### NOTES

*Author’s note:* This essay has been in the works for a long time, and I thank the many people who have helped shepherd it along, especially Amahl Bishara, Andre Gingrich, Tobias Kelly, Laleh Khalili, Sian Lazar, Yezid Sayigh, Ajantha Subramanian, Winifred Tate, and Jessica Winegar. (Apologies to those whose interactions with this piece I have since forgotten.) Funding for some of the research included in this article was provided by the Palestinian American Research Center and SOAS, University of London, for which I am grateful. I also extend my thanks to the many people in Palestine who took the time to talk with me, for the research assistance of Rana Baker, for the challenging feedback of the anonymous reviewers of this journal, and especially for the encouragement of the editors, Akram Khater and Jeffrey Culang, who saw this article through to completion.

<sup>1</sup>David Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy: The Mast of Power, from Hobbes, Orwell and Beyond* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup>Judith Shklar, “Let Us Not Be Hypocritical,” *Daedalus* 108 (1979): 24.

<sup>3</sup>Much of the recent scholarship on the problem of conspiracy and hypocrisy in politics focuses on liberal and specifically western democracies, or makes generalizing claims regarding all political situations. Runciman claims that his book parses different kinds of hypocrisy “at work in the morally pluralistic world of modern politics using the history of political thought as a guide,” and then focuses only on English thinkers, from Hobbes to Orwell. Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, 4. Philosopher Judith Shklar also considers only a western context. Shklar, “Let Us Not Be Hypocritical.”

<sup>4</sup>Daniel Pipes, *The Hidden Hand: Middle East Fears of Conspiracy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup>International Crisis Group, *Dealing with Hamas* (Amman/Brussels: Middle East Report, no. 21, January 2004), 5–6, accessed 8 January 2016, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Israel%20Palestine/Dealing%20With%20Hamas.pdf>, 5–6.

<sup>7</sup>“Hamas wa-Khawnat Fath,” n.d., YouTube video, accessed 3 June 2016, <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=zV1Brrrb2xI>.

<sup>8</sup>International Crisis Group, *After Gaza* (Middle East Report, no. 68, August 2007), 1, accessed 7 January 2016, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Israel%20Palestine/68\\_after\\_gaza.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Israel%20Palestine/68_after_gaza.ashx); Amnesty International, “Occupied Palestinian Territories: Torn Apart by Factional Strife,” Amnesty International, 24 October 2007, accessed 3 October 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE21/020/2007>; Human Rights Watch, “Palestinian Authority: Punish Imam’s Death in Custody, Implement Recommendations of Legislative Commission,” Human Rights Watch, accessed 20 September 2008, <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2008/04/04/isrlpa18425.htm>.

<sup>9</sup>ICHR-Independent Commission for Human Rights, *The Status of Human Rights in Palestine: ICHR 17th Annual Report* (Ramallah: ICHR, 2011), accessed 8 October 2014, <http://www.ichr.ps/en/2/6/753/ICHR-17th-Annual-Report-ICHR-17th-Annual-Report.htm#.VDZdbec9Hgo>.

<sup>10</sup>“Isabat Tifl fi I’tida’ al-Sulta ‘ala Mu’tasimin,” *Al-Risala Net*, 15 July 2012, accessed 7 October 2014, <http://alresalah.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=55555>.

<sup>11</sup>“Semiotic ideology” is Webb Keane’s term to indicate a value system that mediates, interprets, and rationalizes representational economies. The term “representational economy” refers “to the dynamic interconnections among different modes of signification at play within a particular historical and social formation.” To put it another way, Keane is expanding the notion of language ideology to include the varieties of ways that people in a society think about how representations work. Webb Keane, “Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Material Things,” *Language and Communication* 23 (2003): 410.

<sup>12</sup>I use “ethics” or “ethical system” to refer to the standards by which people *evaluate* their own and others’ behaviors and dispositions as good or bad, right or wrong, when moral principles come to the fore. I use “morality,” or “moral,” to refer more to the *norms* and principles that are the bases of evaluation, of ethical judgments.

<sup>13</sup>The view that the PA is corrupt is widely shared, with one poll indicating that 81 percent of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory believe that there is corruption in Palestinian Authority institutions. Tariq Dana, “Corruption in Palestine: A Self-Enforcing System,” 18 August 2015, accessed 7 January 2016, <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/corruption-in-palestine/>. The Hamas video is available on YouTube: “Hamas wa-Khawnat Fath,” YouTube video, n.d., accessed 7 October 2014, <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=zV1Brrrb2xI>.

<sup>14</sup>David Rose, “The Gaza Bombshell,” *Vanity Fair*, 10 March 2008, accessed 30 August 2012, <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/04/gaza200804>.

<sup>15</sup>“Al-Wajh al-Haqiqi li-Harakat Hamas,” YouTube video, n.d., accessed 7 October 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSB00sNoubA>.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Jackals and hyenas also appear in the first work of prose fiction in Arabic, Ibn al-Muqaffa’s *Kalila wa-Dimna* (an Arabic translation of an ancient Indian book called *Panchatantra*), which features political allegory through animal fables. In one folk story, a hyena tricks a beautiful girl, Jibayna, and takes her to his cave.

<sup>18</sup>Summerson E. Carr, *Scripting Addiction: The Politics of Therapeutic Talk and American Sobriety* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 4. The ideology of inner reference is also described in Michael Silverstein, “Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology,” in *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels*, ed. Paul Clyne, William Hanks, and C. L. Hofbauer (Chicago: Chicago Linguistics Society, 1979), 193–247. Linguistic anthropologist Judith Irvine provides the clearest definition of language ideology: “Language ideologies are conceptualizations about languages, speakers, and discursive practices. Like other kinds of ideologies, language ideologies are pervaded with political and moral interests and are shaped in a cultural setting. To study language ideologies, then, is to explore the nexus of language, culture, and politics. It is to examine how people construe language’s role in a social and cultural world, and how their construals are socially positioned. Those construals include the ways people conceive of language itself, as well as what they understand by the particular languages and ways of speaking.” Judith Irvine, “Language Ideology,” *Oxford Bibliographies in Anthropology*, accessed 7 January 2016, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0012.xml>.



<sup>19</sup>Semiotic ideology is broader than linguistic ideology, and refers to the ways that people think about how representations work generally, including meaning making through actions, not just through words. Keane, "Semiotics and the Social Analysis," 410.

<sup>20</sup>While Joel Robbins attributes the importance of transparency and sincerity to the influence of "many kinds of Christianity" in "modern" or "Western" linguistic ideology, there is no evidence allowing me to identify any primary source, religious or otherwise, for the predominance of sincerity in the Palestinian context. Joel Robbins, "God Is Nothing but Talk: Modernity, Language, and Prayer in a Papua New Guinea Society," *American Anthropologist* 103 (2001): 905; Robbins, "On Not Knowing Other Minds: Confession, Intention, and Linguistic Exchange in a Papua New Guinea Community," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81 (2008): 421–29.

<sup>21</sup>Webb Keane, "Others, Other Minds, and Others' Theories of Other Minds: An Afterword on the Psychology and Politics of Opacity Claims," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81 (2008): 473–82.

<sup>22</sup>Although I bring this variety of kinds of opacity claim making together because they emerge out of a common sociopolitical context and Palestinian concerns about them take a similar form, clearly lying, conspiratorial practice, and conspiracy theorizing are not the same. Other scholars have parsed the analysis of hypocrisy (e.g., Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*; Shklar, "Let Us Not Be Hypocritical"), sincerity (e.g., Keane, "Others, Other Minds"; Robbins, "God Is Nothing but Talk"; Robbins, "On Not Knowing Other Minds"), transparency and accountability (Marilyn Strathern, "The Tyranny of Transparency," *British Educational Research Journal* 26 [2000]: 309–21), and lying (Michael Gilson, "Lying, Honour and Contradiction," in *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior*, ed. Bruce Kapferer [Philadelphia, Pa.: Institute for the Study of Humanities, 1976], 191–219). Mathijs Pelkmans and Rhys Machold draw attention to the potentially oppressive political and ideological load of labeling something a "conspiracy theory" in "Conspiracy Theories and Their Truth Trajectories," *Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 59 (2011): 66–80.

<sup>23</sup>Daniel Hellinger, "Paranoia, Conspiracy and Hegemony in American Politics," in *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*, ed. Harry G. West and Todd Sanders (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 205; Paul A. Silverstein, "An Excess of Truth: Violence, Conspiracy Theorizing and the Algerian Civil War," *Anthropological Quarterly* 75 (2002): 644, 646.

<sup>24</sup>Jon W. Anderson, "Conspiracy Theories, Premature Entextualization, and Popular Political Analysis," *Arab Studies Journal* 4 (1996): 96–102; Hellinger, "Paranoia, Conspiracy and Hegemony," 206; Jane Parish, "From Liverpool to Freetown: West African Witchcraft, Conspiracy and the Occult," *Culture and Religion* 6 (2005): 357.

<sup>25</sup>George E. Marcus and Michael G. Powell, "From Conspiracy Theories in the Incipient New World Order of the 1990s to Regimes of Transparency Now," *Anthropological Quarterly* 76 (2003): 325–26. Cf. Silverstein, "An Excess of Truth," 650; Martin Jay, *The Virtues of Mendacity: On Lying in Politics* (Charlottesville, Va. and London: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 8; Robbins, "On Not Knowing Other Minds"; and Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972). I am making a very different argument from those of scholars who tie the normative ideal of sincere speech to Christianity, or to the formulation of modernity and Protestantism's role in it. Whereas Protestantism entails "a project of fostering and authorizing autonomous, individual selves," Palestinian metadiscourse about sincerity and duplicity circulates in an environment in which nationalism is hegemonic; rather than religion, it is nationalism and the occupation that overcode life. Webb Keane, "Sincerity, 'Modernity,' and the Protestants," *Cultural Anthropology* 17 (2002): 69.

<sup>26</sup>Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, ed., *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>27</sup>This is what much anthropology of knowledge production has aimed to do since Evans-Pritchard showed how magic made sense to the Azande. Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

<sup>28</sup>Hannah Arendt, "Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers," *New York Review of Books*, 18 November 1971, 6.

<sup>29</sup>John S. Nelson, "Politics and Truth: Arendt's Problematic," *American Journal of Political Science* 22 (1978): 274. See also Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 140.

<sup>30</sup>Hamoked, "One Big Prison—Freedom of Movement to and from the Gaza Strip on the Eve of the Disengagement Plan," Hamoked, 29 March 2005, accessed 30 August 2012, <http://www.hamoked.org/Document.aspx?dID=12800>; Hamoked, "Arbitrary and Unreasonable Directive as a Precondition for Appeals to the Erez DCO Principal Correspondence," Hamoked, 21 January 2007, accessed 30 August 2012, <http://www.hamoked.org/Document.aspx?dID=8801>; B'Tselem, "Background on the Restriction of Movement," B'Tselem, 15 July 2012, accessed 30 August 2012, [http://www.btselem.org/freedom\\_of\\_movement](http://www.btselem.org/freedom_of_movement).

<sup>31</sup>See, for example, B'Tselem's explanation of Israel's use of "administrative detention," by which Palestinians are imprisoned without charge or trial for an indefinitely extendable length of time. B'Tselem, "Administrative Detention," B'Tselem, n.d., accessed 29 August 2012, [http://www.btselem.org/topic/administrative\\_detention](http://www.btselem.org/topic/administrative_detention).

<sup>32</sup>Hamoked, "One Big Prison"; Hamoked, "Arbitrary and Unreasonable Directive"; B'Tselem, "Background on the Restriction of Movement."

<sup>33</sup>Yizhar Be'er and Saleh Abdel-Jawad, "Collaborators in the Occupied Territories: Human Rights Abuses and Violations," B'Tselem, January 1994, accessed 7 January 2016, [http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/199401\\_collaboration\\_suspects](http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/199401_collaboration_suspects); Ron Yaron, "Holding Health to Ransom: GSS Interrogation and Extortion of Palestinian Patients at the Erez Crossing," Physicians for Human Rights—Israel, August 2008, accessed 8 January 2016, <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/PHR-I%20-%20Holding%20health%20to%20ransom.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup>Jonathan Cook, "Spotlight Shines on Palestinian Collaborators," *Al-Jazeera*, 17 February 2014, accessed 7 January 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/02/spotlight-shines-palestinian-collaborators-201421611151157762.html>.

<sup>35</sup>Tobias Kelly, "In a Treacherous State: The Fear of Collaboration among West Bank Palestinians," in *Suspicion, Intimacy, and the Ethics of State-Building*, ed. Sharika Thiranyagama and Tobias Kelly (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 169–87; B'Tselem, "Collaborators in the Occupied Territories: Human Rights Abuses and Violations," B'Tselem, January 1994, accessed 29 August 2012, [http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/199401\\_collaboration\\_suspects](http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/199401_collaboration_suspects).

<sup>36</sup>Hamoked, "Behind Closer Doors: The Role of the Israeli General Security Service in Preventing Medical Treatment for Palestinian Patients," Hamoked, 1 October 2006, accessed 30 August 2012, <http://www.hamoked.org/Document.aspx?dID=8213>; B'Tselem, "Knesset Enacts Racist Law," B'Tselem, n.d., accessed 30 August 2012, <http://www.btselem.org/page/knesset-enacts-racist-law>.

<sup>37</sup>B'Tselem, "Administrative Detention in the Occupied Territories," B'Tselem, 1 January 2012, accessed 30 August 2012, [http://www.btselem.org/administrative\\_detention/occupied\\_territories](http://www.btselem.org/administrative_detention/occupied_territories).

<sup>38</sup>Lori Allen, "Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal during the Second Palestinian Intifada," *Cultural Anthropology* 23 (2008): 453–87.

<sup>39</sup>Adam Hanieh, "The Oslo Illusion," *Jacobin*, April 2013, accessed 2 August 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2013/04/the-oslo-illusion/>.

<sup>40</sup>Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*; Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 30; Timothy Melley, *Empire and Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

<sup>41</sup>Misty L. Bastian, "Diabolic Realities: Narratives of Conspiracy, Transparency, and 'Ritual Murder' in the Nigerian Popular Print and Electronic Media," in *Transparency and Conspiracy*, 65–91; Susan Harding and Kathleen Stewart, "Anxieties of Influence: Conspiracy Theory and Therapeutic Culture in Millennial America," in *Transparency and Conspiracy*, 258–86; Todd Sanders, "Invisible Hands and Visible Goods: Revealed and Concealed Economies in Millennial Tanzania," in *Transparency and Conspiracy*, 148–74.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Keane, "Others, Other Minds," 481.

<sup>43</sup>Jarrett Zigon, "Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand: A Theoretical Framework for an Anthropology of Moralities," *Anthropological Theory* 7 (2007): 131–50.

<sup>44</sup>The ban on "shedding Palestinian blood" was written into the 2007 Mecca Agreement between Fatah and Hamas.

<sup>45</sup>B'Tselem, "Severe Human Rights Violations in Inter-Palestinian Clashes," B'Tselem, n.d., accessed 29 August 2012, [http://www.btselem.org/English/Inter\\_Palestinian\\_Violations/Index.aspx](http://www.btselem.org/English/Inter_Palestinian_Violations/Index.aspx); International Crisis Group, *Ruling Palestine I: Gaza under Hamas* (Gaza, Jerusalem, Brussels: Middle East Report no. 73, March 2008), 10, accessed 29 August 2012, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/072-ruling-palestine-i-gaza-under-hamas.aspx>.

<sup>46</sup>Todd Sanders and Harry G. West, "Power Revealed and Concealed in the New World Order," in *Transparency and Conspiracy*, 7.

<sup>47</sup>Dominic Boyer, "Conspiracy, History and Therapy at a Berlin Stammtisch," *American Ethnologist* 33 (2006): 328. See also Harding and Stewart, "Anxieties of Influence," 260.

<sup>48</sup>Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*, 140–41.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Leslie Butt, "'Lipstick Girls' and 'Fallen Women': AIDS and Conspiratorial Thinking in Papua, Indonesia," *Cultural Anthropology* 20 (2005): 412–42; and Hellinger, "Paranoia, Conspiracy and Hegemony."

<sup>50</sup>Boyer, "Conspiracy, History and Therapy," 328.

<sup>51</sup>Rema Hammami and Salim Tamari, "The Second Uprising: End or New Beginning?," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30 (2001): 5–25; Lori Allen, "Palestinians Debate 'Polite' Resistance to Occupation," *Middle East Report* 225 (2002): 38–43.

<sup>52</sup>In his widely cited and influential book *Sincerity and Authenticity*, American literary critic Lionel Trilling defined sincerity as necessarily a matter of the relationship between words and interior states. With a similar focus on words, anthropologist Webb Keane considers sincerity a matter of words matching thoughts, and has argued that "a full-fledged and explicit concept of sincerity cannot be disentangled from the speech practices by which it could be pragmatically internalized and which would give public evidence for it." But sincerity can be a dimension of any social practice, whether linguistic or behavioral. It is thus useful to expand the notion of sincerity to incorporate nondiscursive actions. Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*; Keane, "Others, Other Minds," 476; Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2007), 209.

<sup>53</sup>Isra Saleh el-Namey, "Gaza Remembers PFLP Activist Slain by Israel during Protest," *Electronic Intifada*, 26 December 2015, accessed 10 January 2016, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/gaza-remembers-pflp-activist-slain-israel-during-protest/15096>.

<sup>54</sup>Nadir al-Safdy, "Kharisha: Azamat Sultat Ramallah Tuqarrib Rahilaha," *Al-Risala Net*, 15 July 2012, accessed 7 October 2014, <http://alresalah.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=55542>; "Ishtayya: Hadha al-I'lan Yasubb fi Maslahat Isra'il. Hamas Tunaqish I'lan Qita' Ghazza Muharraran fi al-Qahira," *Fateh.org*, accessed 22 July 2012 [http://www.fatehorg.ps/index.php?action=show\\_page&ID=8827&lang=ar](http://www.fatehorg.ps/index.php?action=show_page&ID=8827&lang=ar). Document on file with author.

<sup>55</sup>An example of accusations of lying that circulated in news media is "Abu Layla: Wafd Hamas 'Atila Kull Muhawalat al-Ittifaq wa-Sa'a li-Tahwil al-Mubadara al-Yamaniyya ila Mujarrad Bunud li-Hiwar Lahiq," *Wafa*, 21 March 2008, accessed 8 October 2014, <http://www.wafa.ps/arabic/index.php?action=detail&id=4572>.

<sup>56</sup>"Fadiha Mudawwiyya li-Nadi al-Asir al-Fathawi," *Al-Risala Net*, 15 July 2012, accessed 7 October 2014, <http://alresalah.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=55575>.

<sup>57</sup>Julie Peteet, "Icons and Militants: Mothering in the Danger Zone," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23 (1997): 103–29.

<sup>58</sup>Jay, *The Virtues of Mendacity*, 45.

<sup>59</sup>Amahl A. Bishara, *Back Stories: U.S. News Production and Palestinian Politics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2012), 71.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>61</sup>"Hal Hall al-Sulta Huwa al-Hall?," *Al-Risala Net*, 12 July 2012, accessed 11 October 2014, <http://alresalah.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=55390>.

<sup>62</sup>Kamal 'Aliyan, "Man Yarsum Kharitat al-Tariq li-l-Musalaha?," *Al-Risala Net*, 1 June 2012, accessed 7 October 2014, <http://alresalah.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=52688>; Ashraf al-Hurr, " Hamas Tattahim al-Sulta wa-Fath bi-Wad' Mukhattat Musbaq li-Ikhrajih min <al-Mashhad al-Siyasi> bi-Ijra' al-Intikhabat fi Ajwa' <Ghayr Sihhiyya>," *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 3 July 2012, accessed 7 October 2014, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/index.asp?fname=data\2012\07\07-03\03qpt946.htm>; Al-Risala Net, "Qarar Sa'ib bi-Tariqa Khata'a," *Al-Risala Net*, 5 July 2012, accessed 8 October 2014, <http://alresalah.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=54907>.

<sup>63</sup>Mu'min Bisisu, "al-Tariq ila al-Shiraka al-Wataniyya," *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 14 June 2012, accessed 8 October 2014, <http://alresalah.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=53484>.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>Amr Shammakh, *Mudhakkirat al-Shahid al-Duktur 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rantisi* (n.p.: Dar al-Tawzi' wa-l-Nashr al-Islamiyya, 2004).

<sup>66</sup>Nadir al-Safdi, "Kharisha: Azamat Sultat Ramallah."

<sup>67</sup>Mustafa Sawwaf, "al-Sulta wa-Malaff Ightiyal 'Arafat," *Al-Risala Net*, 9 July 2012, accessed 8 October 2014, <http://alresalah.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=55151>.

<sup>68</sup>“Masdar Amni: Barhum Tajawaz al-Khutut al-Hamra’ ‘abr Tashwih al-Mu’assasa al-Amniyya wa-Ittihamiha bi-l-Ta’awun ma’a al-Ihtilal,” *Wafa*, 12 July 2012, accessed 8 October 2014, <http://www.wafa.ps/arabic/index.php?action=detail&id=135085>.

<sup>69</sup>Al-Hayat al-Jadida, “al-Shubaki: Ma Yajri fi Ghazza Huwa Harb min Hamas did al-Nizam al-Dimuqrati al-Filastini,” *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 17 December 2008, accessed 11 October 2014, <http://www.alhayat-j.com/details.php?opt=3&id=46743&cid=1361>; “Fath: Tasrihat al-Ramahi Dalil ‘Aqliyyat al-Iqsa’,” *Wafa*, 19 July 2012, accessed 25 July 2012, <http://www.wafa.ps/arabic/index.php?action=detail&id=135085>; “Assaf: Qiyadat Hamas bi-l-Diffa Tad’u li-l-Fitna wa-l-Inqilab Badala ‘an Tad’u li-l-Musalaha,” *Wafa*, 16 July 2012, accessed 8 October 2014, <http://www.wafa.ps/arabic/index.php?action=detail&id=135286>.

<sup>70</sup>“Abu Layla”; “Masdar Amni”; “Fath: Tasrihat al-Ramahi”; “Al-Ahmad: Musta’iddun li-l-Tawqi’ ‘ala al-Mubadara al-Yamaniyya Nassan wa-Ruhan lakin Wafd Hamas Ja’ li-Ta’diliha wa-Laysa li-l-Ittifaq,” *Wafa*, 22 March 2012, accessed 8 October 2014, <http://www.wafa.ps/arabic/index.php?action=detail&id=4645>.

<sup>71</sup>“Fath: Tasrihat al-Ramahi.”

<sup>72</sup>Palestinian Muslims are overwhelmingly Sunni. This term *taqiyya* is typically used to describe Shi’a, and may underscore the otherness of Hamas. Adam is a pseudonym, as are all references to interlocutors. Quotes are from interviews conducted during the winter of 2007–8, through the summer of 2009.

<sup>73</sup>In the religious thought of Shi’i, Isma’ili, and Sufi Muslims, the Qur’an has an apparent meaning, and *bāṭin* refers to the inner meaning or esoteric sense of the Qur’an. Like the term *taqiyya* mentioned above, the Shi’i connotation of *bāṭin* and its use to describe Hamas may imply that the Islamist group embodies a dangerous kind of otherness.

<sup>74</sup>J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>75</sup>See, for example, Bernard Bate, “‘To Persuade Them into Speech and Action’: Oratory and the Tamil Political, Madras, 1905–1919,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55 (2013): 142–66; James S. Bielo, “‘How Much of This is Promise?’ God as Sincere Speaker in Evangelical Bible Reading,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 84 (2011): 631–53; and Jennifer Jackson, “‘God’s Law Indeed Is There to Protect You from Yourself’: The Christian Personal Testimonial as Narrative and Moral Schemata to the US Political Apology,” *Language and Communication* 32 (2012): 48–61.

<sup>76</sup>Rich Wiles, “Palestinian Intellectuals Demand ‘Unity’ in Actions, not Words,” *Middle East Eye*, 17 July 2014, accessed 5 August 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/palestinian-intellectuals-demand-unity-actions-not-words-1698298533#sthash.3fGJE2wd.dpuf>.

<sup>77</sup>Robert Blecher, “Hamas and Fatah Are Both Taking On Water,” *Foreign Policy*, 3 June 2010, accessed 8 January 2016, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/blecher-fatah-and-hamas-are-both-taking-on-water.aspx>.

<sup>78</sup>These opinions are largely echoed in these Palestinian political analysts’ views: Jamal Juma’, Jamil Hilal, Nijmeh Ali, Khalil Shaheen, Jaber Suleiman, Mjriam Abu Samra, Belal Shobaki, and Alaa Tartir, “Palestinian Youth Revolt: Any Role for Political Parties?,” *al-Shabaka*, 23 November 2015, accessed 7 January 2016, <https://al-shabaka.org/roundtables/palestinian-youth-revolt-any-role-for-political-parties/>; and Haidar Eid, “Dis-participation as a Palestinian Strategy?,” *al-Shabaka*, 9 December 2013, accessed 10 January 2016, <https://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/dis-participation-as-a-palestinian-strategy/>.

<sup>79</sup>Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” *The New Yorker*, 25 February 1967, 78; Nelson, “Politics and Truth,” 273.