

The Story of a monument, Land Day in Sakhnin, 1976–1978

Tal Ben Zvi

Introduction

Monuments serve an important role in the formation of the modern nation (Gillis 1994; Anderson 1999). Their presence in the public space echoes the struggle for sovereignty and the nation's success in this struggle, as can also be seen in Muslim states in the Middle East (Gershoni and Jankowski 1986). Therefore, monuments comprise an important part of the totality of material and visual elements that constitute the nation's cultural heritage and the ways in which it remembers and re-remembers its past (Winter and Sivan 1999). Gellner (1983) even claims that the national heritage is created in a process of exo-socialization, which starts within a privileged social stratum that includes artists and cultural figures who produce different cultural artifacts such as the monument. The monument serves an especially important role since it echoes the memory of shared suffering and willingness to make further sacrifices for the nation in the future (Mosse 1990). These are perceived as more powerful unifying and consolidating emotional elements than shared cultural heritages based on the memory of a shared happiness (Renan [1882] 2018). Commemoration is therefore seen as a central concept for understanding the ways in which the shared cultural heritage crystallizes. The repetitive element of the commemoration ceremonies and of the other, formal or informal commemorative activities, yields “commemorative” texts that in their turn create defined “commemorative narratives” (Zerubavel 1994).

How can we therefore understand the supposed role of a monument that echoes the national struggle of an ethno-national group that has no sovereignty, whose members are citizen of another nation state with which they have a complex relationship that intersects struggle and co-existence? The story of the *Land Day monument* (The Monument) in Sakhnin seeks to shed light on this question.

The Land Day (*Yom Al-Ard* in Arabic) monument in Sakhnin (1976–1978) by Abed Abdi and Gershon Knispel commemorates the death of six Arab citizens who were shot by the Israeli police during the violent demonstrations held in 1976 against the

government's confiscation of Palestinian land (Sorek 2015). Since the tragic event, this day has been known as Land Day and has been marked by an annual ceremony on March 30 (Sorek 2008). The monument is identified as one of the turning points in the Palestinian presence in the public arena in the state of Israel. It is thus perceived as a particularly significant and influential factor in the formation of the national visual memory of the Palestinian minority in Israel. Since the state of Israel denied its Arab citizens their national identity and tried to create a local Arab identity that is loyal to the state of Israel, most of the Palestinians' shared heritage has had to be transmitted orally in the realm of the private sphere (Lustick 1980; Rabinowitz 1993; Ghanem 2001). Being positioned in the public sphere, the monument stands out in the way it remembers the past and in the way it wishes to redefine the future heritage of the Palestinians living in Israel.

Through a visual analysis of the monument commemorating the Land Day fallen created by Abdi and Knispel, and a series of in-depth interviews with the artists, I will examine the relations between the representations of the national memory embedded in the monument, and the unique political and cultural circumstances in which the Palestinian minority is trying to carve its shared heritage within the state of Israel.

Palestinian art in the diaspora, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip

The Arab society in Palestine during the British Mandate was mostly rural, and therefore had less exposure to plastic art than more urban societies. Moreover, and although Kamal Boullata (2009) dates and analyzes the roots of Palestinian art as early as the 19th century, modern Palestinian culture was in its vast majority verbal, and before '48 produced mainly literary and poetic masterpieces. After the various fields of cultural creation by the Arab population in mandatory Palestine suffered a bad blow as a result of the expulsion or departure of most of the Palestinian intelligentsia, literature and poetry, rather than plastic art, were the first to recover from the shock and muteness of the *Nakba* (Arabic for the catastrophe) (Balas 1970). Palestinian plastic art after '48 started as an act of ongoing creation that wished to capture and comprehend the catastrophe of the *Nakba* and the memory of mandatory Palestine, and turn them into the central national cultural heritage unifying the Palestinian diaspora as a whole (Boullata 2000; Ankory 2006). A major importance was ascribed in this process to monuments and commemoration sites, which function as realms of memory with a material reality and a dominant visibility in the public space (Nora 1989).

Despite that, Palestinian art took its first steps in creating the platform for the Palestinian cultural heritage mainly by using the art of print. Print played an important role in disseminating the national narrative that the artists wanted to advance,

in political circumstances that did not allow for a more material representation of the Palestinian nationality. Ismail Shammout (1930–2006) was one of the first Palestinian artists who used the art of print to convey a national narrative that would lead to the construction of the Palestinian national heritage after the Nakba (Ben Zvi and Farah 2008). Shammout often used figurative language, which allowed him to speak to the heart of “the people”. He used his talent as an artist didactically in order to document the development of the Palestinian saga and arouse support for the national struggle (Boullata 2001).

Thus, many of Shammout’s works were reproduced and widely disseminated in posters, postcards, and calendars. After Shammout fled from Lod in 1948, and after a long and arduous journey through Jordan and a Gaza refugee camp, he moved in 1956 to Beirut. He left Beirut for Kuwait after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, spent several years in Germany, and died in Amman in 2006. Shammout’s life story embodies the ordeal of the Palestinian odyssey that was reflected in his work, which laid the foundations for the narrative of the Palestinian art and the Palestinian national heritage in the years to come.

Shammout took on the mission of a witness, whose role was to tell the world and its future generations the story of his people through art. He served as the first head of the PLO’s art education department immediately after the organization was founded in 1964, and his book *Art in Palestine* (1989) was the first publication on Palestinian art and its history. For these and other reasons, the role he played was of particular importance for both the establishment of the field of Palestinian art and the formulation of modes of representation of the Nakba, which were also disseminated in the works of other artists in the Palestinian diaspora, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

Shammout’s influence on the work of Abdi is of particular importance in regards to the images that represent the Palestinian heritage after the Nakba.

Abdi attests to the mutual influence and reciprocal artistic relations he maintained in the 1970s and 80s with Palestinian artists of his own generation from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, who acquired their education at art schools in the Arab world (mainly in Cairo, Alexandria, and Baghdad), including Nabil Anani (b. 1943, Latroun), Taysir Barakat (b. 1959, in a Gaza refugee camp), Ibrahim Saba (b. 1941, Ramla), Issam Bader (b. 1948, Hebron), Vera Tamari (b. 1945, Jerusalem), Tahani Skeik (b. 1955, Gaza), Taleb Dweik (b. 1952, Jerusalem), Kamal Moghanni (b. 1944, Gaza), Fathi Ghanem (b. 1947, Gaza), and others. The most notable is Suleiman Mansour (b. 1947, Bir Zeit) who, in contrast with the above mentioned group, studied at the *Bezalel Academy of Art and Design* in Jerusalem for one year (1969–1970).

Abdi also became very familiar with the work of artists active in the Palestinian diaspora who engaged in the pure symbolism of “Palestinian suffering”. Among the notable refugee camp artists are Naji al-Ali (b. 1936 in the Galilee and grew up in a Lebanese refugee camp) who worked in Lebanon, Kuwait, and London; Ibrahim

Hazima (b. 1933 in Acre and grew up in Ladhqiya, Syria) and who won an art scholarship in East Germany and later continued to work in Europe; Tamam al-Akhal (b. 1935, Jaffa) who studied art in Alexandria and Cairo, married Ismail Shammout and worked in Beirut from where she moved to Jordan; and Kamal Boullata (b. 1942, Jerusalem) who studied art in Rome and Washington and on completing his studies in 1968 remained in the United States, where he wrote the history of Palestinian art (1989; 2000; 2009).

In the context of Palestinian art in Israel, it is notable that as a result of the Palestinian Nakba and life under military rule, Palestinian artists became active within Israel's borders only at a relatively late stage, some 25 years after the establishment of the State of Israel. The military rule period (1948–1966) imposed harsh isolation on those artists who remained within Israel's borders. The imposition of military rule on the majority of Arab residential areas by virtue of British Mandate emergency laws was intended to restrict, as it indeed did, the freedom of expression, movement, and organization of the Arab citizens. It was therefore only after military rule was revoked in 1966 that young Palestinians began to study art in Israel and abroad and widen the visual expressions of the Palestinian heritage.

Only following the Oslo accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, did the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s see the opening of exhibition spaces. See for example the Al Wasiti Art Center (1994), Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art (1997), Al Hoash (2005) in East Jerusalem; the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center (1996), Zariab gallery (1998) and the AM Qattan Foundation (1998) in Ramallah; Al-Kahf Gallery at the International Center (1995) in Bethlehem.

Palestinian art in Haifa, Israel

Many Palestinian artists in Israel who worked in the 1950s and 1960s identified as part of the social realism that came together in "Red Haifa". The ethnically and nationally mixed city with its large workers population became a hub of radical political narratives that included those of the Palestinians, which was an uncommon phenomenon in Israel at that time (Balas 1989). The artists that belonged to the group engaged in every facet of the Israeli reality out of a profound identification with its deprived and discriminated-against sections. They sought to create art with social messages that would be understood by and be accessible to "the masses", and thus they created artistic prints that were both affordable and conveyed their message. The artist Gershon Knispel was the driving force behind the Haifa social realism artists' circle, whose ranks included Alex Levi and Shmuel Hilsberg, and maintained contact with artists who created in this style and resided in other locations in Israel, such as Avraham Ofek, Ruth Schluss, Shimon Zabar, and Naftali Bezem.

Another member of the group was Abed Abdi. Abdi was born in 1942 in the Church quarter in downtown Haifa.¹ In April 1948, he, his mother, his brothers and his sisters were displaced from their home, while his father stayed in Haifa. From Haifa the mother and her children left for Acre and from there a fortnight later they sailed on a rickety ship to Lebanon. In Lebanon they were first put into the Quarantina transit camp in Beirut port, later moved to the Mieh Mieh refugee camp near Saida, and from there continued to Damascus. After three years of moving between refugee camps, in 1951 the mother and her children were allowed to return to within Israel's borders as part of family reunification. In his youth Abdi joined the Haifa branch of *Banki* (the Israeli Communist Youth Federation), where he also started his artistic path. In this environment he became acquainted with social realism and with Israeli artists who adopted this style and who were close at the time to the Israeli socialist and communist left (Balas 1989). In 1962 Abdi was accepted into the *Haifa Association of Painters and Sculptors*, becoming the first Arab artist among its members. That year he also exhibited his first show in Tel Aviv. In 1964 he was sent by the Haifa branch of *The Israeli Communist Party – Maki* to study graphic design, murals, environmental sculpture and art in Dresden, East Germany. Abdi spent seven years in Germany. In the print and etching department he met the person who would be his teacher and an important source of inspiration: the Jewish artist Leah Grundig,² who made her name through her protest drawings against Fascism and Nazism.

Abdi's commitment to this global idea and worldview was also clearly evident in words he said at a panel discussion³ held in 1973 by the *Haifa Association of Painters and Sculptors* at Chagall House, under the title *Artists in the Wake of Events*:

In the same way that an artist lives the events of the past, present, and future, he also lives the conflict between man and the forces of evil and destruction. And when society and humankind are in crisis, the artist is required to express himself harmoniously by means of the artistic vehicle at his disposal [...] and so [...] the role of the artist in his work, thoughts and worldview is to reinforce the perpetual connection between himself and the society in which he lives. I was brought up

-
- 1 The list of artists which I discuss in this paper includes only male artists, since in this preliminary period in the history of local Palestinian art there were almost no active female artists. The few women who studied fine art in the 1980s at the Haifa University, such as the sisters Suhad and Therese Nasser and Amira Dick, later turned to different paths – the first two studied architecture at the *Technion*, and the latter focused on education (Ben Zvi 2004).
 - 2 In one of my conversations with him, Abdi pointed out that his affinity with Leah Grundig was based on her sensitivity to the subjects of war and social injustice, not least because of her belonging to the Jewish minority that suffered greatly during the Nazi period.
 - 3 In addition to Abdi, this panel also included the artists Avshalom Okashi and Gershon Knispel, the art critic Zvi Raphael and the architect Haim Tibon.

according to this approach and thus I understand the connection between my artistic work and the role defined by Kokoschka,⁴ who sought to remove the mask for all those who want to see reality as it is. The role of fine art is to show them the truth (Niv 1974).

Speaking about his art and the 1973 War, Abdi said:

Out of my worldview and my loathing of war, and also out of my profound concern for the future of relations between the two peoples, Arab and Jewish, I have shown my two works here in the exhibition (entitled *Echoes of the Times*, which featured artists from Haifa and the north of Israel). When the cannons thundered on the Golan Heights) and the banks of the (Suez) Canal, and when the future of the region was at risk, I recalled the words of Pablo Picasso. I said 'no to war' in accordance with my artistic beliefs; art must be committed and play a role (ibid).

In this way, Abdi expresses his commitment as an artist to the Palestinian society in Israel, as well as the unique role played by art in raising the social and political consciousness of this society. After several decade of activity in the field of Israeli art, Abdi became one of the prominent Arab artists in this scene.⁵

Description of the monument

The first Land Day took place on 30 March 1976 in protest over the Israeli government's decision to expropriate 20,000 dunams in the Sakhnin area for the purpose of "the Judaization of the Galilee". The leaders of *The New Communist Party – Rakah* and the heads of Arab local councils in the Galilee called for a day of general strike and protest demonstrations on the 30th of March. The demonstration took place mainly in the villages of Sakhnin, Arabeh, and Deir Hanna. During the demonstrations IDF forces confronted the demonstrators; many were injured and six people were killed. It's important to note that the connection to the land is a major part of the lives and identity of the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Since the Palestinians turned overnight from landowners into foreigners in their own homeland, and in

4 Oscar Kokoschka was an Austrian artist and poet known for his expressionist portraits and landscapes. During World War II Kokoschka fled the Nazi regime and painted various anti-Fascist works.

5 In 2008 Abdi became the first Arab artist living in Israel to win the Minister of Science, Culture and Sport Award, together with six other artists, all of whom were Jewish and younger than him. In other words, he was the first Arab artist to gain recognition by mainstream Israeli culture. Replying to an interviewer's question regarding the excitement generated by the event in the Israeli media, Abdi said: "if I really am the first Arab artist, it is neither a compliment to me nor to 60 years of the State of Israel" (Zohar 2008).

light of the demographic turnover caused by the war, the Palestinians' rooted link to the land was undermined and replaced with a feeling of insecurity. In this reality the main object of identification of the Palestinians in Israel was the place. The emotional connection to the land became a central ingredient that in the course of time was considered exalted and sacred (Jamal 2004). In light of this, in 1977, one year after the Land Day events, the *Secretariat of the Committee for the Defense of Arab Lands* decided to erect a monument to commemorate the day and its victims. They decided to approach Abed Abdi and ask him to take on the task. Abdi in turn invited his old friend Gershon Knispel, who had considerable experience in designing monuments, to take part in working on the project.⁶ The two worked out the conceptual-visual framework of the monument together and proceeded to work on the preparatory sketches, four of which were included in the monument's catalogue that was published in 1978, after it was built, each sketch carrying a separate credit. In the last week of March 1978 the building of the monument began at the Muslim cemetery in Sakhnin, under the assumption that its location would protect it from damage, since the Israeli defense forces would refrain from going in there. First they cast the concrete base. Many construction workers from Sakhnin took part in casting the base, which took several hours. During the construction the police arrested the head of Sakhnin council, Jamal Tarabei, for giving permission for illegal construction, but released him after a few hours.

The monument is designed as a kind of four-sided sarcophagus (the Roman coffin) (90X60X30 cm) covered with aluminum reliefs. The aluminum reliefs were fashioned in a way that gives them the appearance of clay. The first panel shows a woman bending and clutching a large jug, while two other women are stooping, one harvesting with a sickle and the other sowing seeds. Below their arms, in the bottom right-hand corner, there is an inscription in English, Arabic and Hebrew: "designed by A. Abdi and G. Knispel to deepen understanding between the two peoples." The second panel shows a sculpted woman bending, holding seeds in her left hand, and scattering them with her right. It continues with a separate panel in which, between the woman and the edge of the image that begins on the side, the following words are inscribed in Hebrew and English: "30.3.1976, In Memory of Those Who Fell on Land Day." The third panel shows two grieving women sculpted successively in profile, kneeling, and covering their faces with their hands. Between the two women

6 Gershon Knispel was born in Cologne, Germany in 1932 and grew up in Haifa. In 1954 he completed his studies at the *Bezalel Academy of Art* in Jerusalem. In the early 1960s he lived in Brazil, but returned to Israel following the military coup that took place there in 1964. In the '60s and '70s he served as artistic consultant to the Haifa mayor. In 1994 Knispel moved to São Paulo, Brazil, where he lived until his death. His ability and rich artistic experience, together with his extensive contacts, enabled the artists to cast the Land Day monument in a Haifa Municipality workshop, and made his contribution to building the monument highly significant.

there is an inscription in Arabic: “they fell so we could live. They live. The fallen of the day of defense of the land, 30 March 1976,” and below it are inscribed the names of those killed and their villages: Khair Muhammad Yassin of Arabeh, Raja Hassin Abu-Ria, Khader Abed Khaleileh, and Khadija Shawhana of Sakhnin, Muhammad Yusuf Taha of Kafr Kana, and Rif’at Zuheiri of Nur Shams, who was shot in Taibe. On the left edge of this panel, towards which the women are facing, an abstract embryonic figure seemingly bursts out of the panel, stretching its hand forward in a gesture of either grasping or pleading for help. The fourth panel completes the sarcophagus image by presenting two figures that look like corpses lying one on top of the other in a lateral, serene composition. Finally, separate from this part of the monument, a free sculpture of a plow stands on its own pedestal: when the tillers of the soil are murdered, the plow remains abandoned and broken. The plow’s handles and axle are sculpted at a 45° angle, and from a certain viewpoint appear to be hands raised in supplication to the heavens. In this sculpture there is special emphasis on the sense of molded clay, which endows it with an organic appearance of patina and antiquity.

On 30 March 1978, the second anniversary of the original Land Day, the monument’s unveiling ceremony took place. In a packed assembly the two artists presented the monument’s model to the *Committee of the Arab Local Councils* in the Galilee (Amit 2008). Since then, every 30 March the monument becomes the focus of the memorial ceremonies for the Land Day events in the Galilee. These ceremonies reflect the formative role Land Day plays in the Palestinian national culture, and also serve as the stage for the different political, social, and cultural struggles summoned by each era. In fact, Land Day became the first public event in which the conditions ripened to create a permanent mark in the public space in the form of a place of gathering, mourning, commemoration and memory, and this place has become a central “site of memory” (Nora 1989) in the Palestinian society in Israel. It is a site that is meant to remind the public and individuals of the events of the past, to mark out meaning for them and provide them with a dynamic source of legitimation. As a “site of memory” it also continues to live in the ceremonies that take place every year and in the press photographs and reports that document them, and thus continues to feed the cultural heritage of the Palestinians in Israel (Sorek 2008). Thus, for example, the reports and photographs of the monument’s inauguration show thousands of people standing at the assembly, listening to the speeches and wishing to touch the monument for the first time. Moreover, the photos of the ceremonies that were published in the Arab press focused mainly on the older population, whose presence there expressed the ongoing and continuous presence of a historical Palestinian memory, since the Nakba and up until 1978. In recent years the monument in the Sakhnin cemetery has also been visited every October at the

end of the March in Memory of the Shaheeds, those killed in October 2000.⁷ Thus over the years, the monument's status as a central place of memory and mourning that constitutes part of the shared cultural heritage of the Palestinian minority in Israel has steadily grown.

Methods

This study used a qualitative research method. It included a methodological visual analysis of the monument as a site of memory and cultural heritage. In addition to the visual analysis, I conducted in-depth interviews with Abed Abdi and Gershon Knispel. The interviews with Abdi were done from 2006 to 2010 and with Knispel in 2006 and 2007. The interviews sought to reveal the world of meanings that guided the visual language used in the monument, as well as the role the artists ascribed to the monument both in the Arab and the Jewish society in Israel.

The interviews were part of an ongoing collaboration during which I curated the exhibition *The Story of a Monument: Land Day Sakhnin 1976–2006, Abed Abdi and Gershon Knispel*. The exhibition showed the preparatory sketches for the monument, a model of the monument, and documentary photography by the photographers Nikola Abdo, Rafik Bachri, Amin Bashir, Yaron Kaminski, Gidon Gitai, Salam Munir Diab, Al-Ittihad Archive and others.

The exhibition was first shown in Jaffa in 2006, and since then has traveled to different exhibition spaces in the Arab society in Israel. During work on the exhibition Abdi and Knispel expressed complete trust in the curatorial work and in the interpretive apparatus that reflected their work. Beyond the in-depth interviews and working on the show, the two also came to the exhibition's opening and spoke at the event.⁸

The interviews were conducted by me in Hebrew, recorded and transcribed. Analyzing the interviews was done in the method of extracting categories. The interview-

7 The October 2000 events were a wave of violent riots and demonstrations by the Palestinian citizens of Israel, which started with demonstrations in solidarity with Palestinians in the West Bank after the start of the Second *Intifada*. The demonstrations included road blocking, attempts to assault Jewish drivers and Jewish settlements, arson attacks and violent clashes with police forces. During the events the demonstrators were shot with rubber bullets and live ammunition. The Israeli government established a national commission of inquiry to investigate the events, which severely criticized government ministers, police officers, and leaders of the Arab public in Israel.

8 For more on this see the exhibition's website <http://www.hagar-gallery.com/landay/home.html> as well as the video documentation in which they speak together at the exhibition's opening event in Jaffa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ST3a9GWNhsg&t=710s> and a video clip in which Abdi speaks in Haifa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eef7tBnACxY&t=389s>

wees' words were analyzed along two main axes: (1) the visual elements that represent the national cultural heritage; (2) the ideological characteristics of these visual elements.

Analysis

Land as a particular element in constructing the cultural heritage

The monument that Abdi and Knispel designed simulates a sarcophagus with four panels which are covered with aluminum reliefs. The subject uniting the reliefs on the panels is the link between man and his land. To highlight the land motif, the aluminum reliefs were processed in a way that gives them the appearance of clay. The man-land connection is conveyed through a series of interactions that appear on the reliefs and include contact between man and land and land and man. These circular interactions signify a permanent, inextricable relationship between the two. A relationship in which man breathes life into the land and thus into himself, and vice versa. Thus, for example, the sarcophagus' first panel shows a bent woman embracing a large urn and two other women hunched next to her. One of the women is holding a sickle and harvesting, and the other is scattering seeds. In contrast to Knispel's preparatory sketch, the sower appears in the relief in profile, while the two other figures recall in their appearance the two hunched peasants in the painting *The Gleaners* (1857) by one of the forefathers of social realism who often painted peasants, Jean-Francois Millet (1814–1875). Millet's realistic and empathic portrayals of peasants fitted the monument's creators' conception of the man-land relationship (Sensier 1881). The sarcophagus's second panel shows a sculpted hunched woman who is holding seeds in her left hand and scattering them in her right. (Fig. 1) This woman's broad face and heavy body bring to mind the women figures in the monumental murals of the Mexican artists Diego Rivera (1886–1957) and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974), two major Latin social realist artists. The rhythmic repetition of the two almost identical figures, which are portrayed in economic and schematic profile, recalls visual patterns that appear on papyruses and pharaonic murals.

In addition, since then the monument's creators have come several times on 30 March, Land Day, to the exhibition's openings in the different exhibition spaces, including: Kalansowa, Taibe, Arrabe, Tamra, Yafia, Haifa.

Knispel came to the exhibitions' openings until 2015. Abdi came to the exhibition's opening every year, including the last exhibition which opened on 30 March 2022 in Deir Hanna. The personal relationship between Abdi and me reached its climax in our collaboration on the retrospective I curated for him at the Umm el-Fahem Gallery (Ben Zvi 2010) in 2010: *Abed Abdi, 50 Years of Creativity (Retrospective)*.

This visual tie echoes monumental burial art and emphasizes the motif of perpetuating the memory of the dead person for whom the monument was erected. The fourth panel completes the image of the sarcophagus by presenting two figures that look like corpses lying one on top of the other in a horizontal and peaceful composition. The bare and eyes-shut face of the lower figure is reminiscent in its features of representations of Roman legionnaires (mediated by representations of Soviet soldiers),⁹ and its head covering looks almost like a helmet. These images further emphasize the motif of the sarcophagus used in the monument. Finally, separate from this part of the monument, the free sculpture of a plow stands on its own pedestal. The forlorn and broken plow tells the story of the peasant's murder. The plow's handles and axle are pointed upwards at a 45° angle. From a certain perspective they look like hand stumps stretching up to the sky in cry and protest. This sculpture particularly highlights the sense of sculpting in clay, which gives the sculpture the organic appearance of patina and antiquity.

The attachment to the land, and especially to a particular piece of land, is evident in Abdi's words when he seeks to strengthen the Palestinians' connection to their land:

I feel the wounds of the non-distant past, and its suffering: the rocky surfaces of brown stone are lying in front of the bulldozers of 'progress', and I have tasted its saltiness, which resembles the one that streams down a swarthy forehead. The same sweat that bitterness-filled history turned into heavy tears that flow on tombstones that have turned into monuments in the villages of Sakhnin, Kafr Qasim, Tantura, and Deir Yassin. The monument we erected in the village of Sakhnin will be a testimony and a pledge to our eternal belonging to this land and to its prayer, and to its sons who rush to defend their motherland (unnumbered 1978).

Along with the national aspiration to the specific piece of land that the Palestinians see as their national home, the human representations connected to the land and engraved on the sarcophagus' sides turn out to be mainly women. The presence of women in the national narrative is surprising. Women appear as peasants and as signifiers of grieving and lamentation. (Fig. 2) This choice was the result of a joint decision by the monument's two creators. The two also accorded central place to figures of women in their other works. In any event, this choice stands in stark contrast to the focus of the period's newspapers on the figure of the *Fellah*, the man. The male figure serves as a key axis in the construction of many national cultural heritages.

9 See for example the Soviet Memorial in Treptower Park in Berlin, which includes sixteen monumental sarcophaguses, each made of square panels that together create reliefs of battle scenes.

Fig. 1: Abed Abdi and Gershon Knispel, Land Day monument, Sakhnin (Photo: Tal Ben Zvi)



Fig. 2: Abed Abdi and Gershon Knispel, Land Day monument, Sakhnin (Photo: Tal Ben Zvi)



Fig. 3: Abed Abdi and Gershon Knispel, Land Day monument, Sakhnin (Photo: Tal Ben Zvi)



The man is mostly presented as a hero carrying the project of nation building on his shoulders, as a real physical act (Anderson and Wendt 2015). Accordingly, the men are presented as warriors, peasants, and construction workers. These roles require a strong and healthy body, willingness to sacrifice and courage. Since war plays a central role in the cultural heritages of modern nations, the monumental figure of the warrior and the active model of masculinity embedded in it take center stage in national heritages, while women are excluded from the narrative and field of the national struggle (Almog 2000).

However, the women featured in Abdi's and Knispel's monument do not adhere to this tendency. Not only is their gender presence unusual in relation to the militant images common to monuments that are dedicated to national memory and to constructing a national cultural heritage, but it is precisely they who serve to make visible and strengthen the man-land connection. Moreover, Abdi's and Knispel's female peasants are completely different from the images of village women that appear in the works of Ismail Shammout. The representation of the figures in the monument highlights their being "proletarians", that is, working, diligent and dedicated women who take active part in the nation building project, in contrast to Shammout's ideal, allegorical images, in which women stand against the background of orchards, fields, and agricultural land, but are not practically engaged in the work. A typical example of this tendency and one of the most famous, which has been printed on numerous posters, postcards, and calendars, is Shammout's painting *The Spring That Was* (1960).¹⁰ At the front of the painting we can see three women: in the center, a woman wearing a dark-colored embroidered Palestinian dress and a long white headscarf. The woman is holding an olive branch and two girls are dancing beside her, one dressed in white and the other in yellow. The picture's second plane shows agricultural scenes that present the dynamics of harmonious rural cooperation in fruit-picking and harvesting.¹¹ The conception of the woman as "mother earth" is present in both Arab literature (Balas 1970) and canonical Palestinian literature (Tamari and Johnson 1995), but in these cases the woman is not presented as a realistic figure but as an idyllic, metaphorical figure that represents an imaginary utopian rural realm.¹²

Shammout creates and leads this tendency, when as part of the Palestinian nationality he greatly emphasizes the figure of the fellah as a symbol for the people's

10 For the picture see: <https://ismail-shammout.com/portfolio/palestine-spring/>

11 Manar Hassan (2018) claims that as a result of the erasure of the Palestinian cities in 1948 and 1949, the Palestinian society was imagined mainly as a rural society that never underwent advanced urbanization processes. She suggests that the existence of the city was forgotten from the Palestinian historiography and the Palestinian collective national memory, and therefore the Palestinian past was constructed as a rural past in different arenas of memory, such as poetry, novels, artworks, autobiographies, and national ceremonies.

12 For more on this see: Ben Zvi (2014).

resilience in the face of the occupation of its land by the state of Israel. But instead of the concrete fellah (who over the years and in many cases turned into a day laborer), he prefers to emphasize the ideal figure of the rural woman who symbolizes a “natural” and utopian agricultural community free of modern influences, class differences, and poverty (Hassan 2018). In offering an imaginary utopian space, this idyllic and ideal approach blurred the profound social and cultural gaps that prevailed in the Palestinian society before 1948. As part of this utopian construction, Shammout created a myriad of lyrical images showing women figures alongside the Palestinian landscape surrounding the village: the olive tree, the orange tree, the lemon tree, the hyssop and so on. These systems reinvented historical Palestine as an allegory lacking concrete time and space. These cultural practices blurred the reference to specific villages and replaced it with characteristic details of village life that together made-up what Foucault (1984) called heterotopia, that is, the virtual reflection of a real place, a reflection that has a utopian and mythical dimension. For the most part, these details comprise representations of agricultural work, spring landscapes in full bloom, traditional houses, and women in traditional Palestinian dress. The village is stereotypically represented as a utopian harmonious place embedded in the heart of a nature that is at once metaphorical and material. This stereotypicality, which is represented through economical identifying features, is an inextricable part of the essence of mythical representation. In contrast to history’s claim to reflect an objective truth, myth represents an interpretation and the coherent point of view of a selective and reductive spiritual topography (Ohana and Wistrich 1996). Thus, myth affords an event, a person or an institution a timeless and placeless meaning (Sweedner 1990).¹³

As already mentioned, the woman motif that appears in the monument’s catalogue represents a different figure of the woman and of Palestine. Thus, a Gideon Gitai photograph that appears in the catalogue shows a mother wearing head covering and a flowery rural dress holding a baby while the rest of her children surround her among the ruins of their demolished home. Abdi would use this photograph in one of his Land Day posters and in the calendar he designed. The visual context linking the woman’s figure and her destroyed house with pictures of house demolitions in refugee camps connects the fate of the 1948 Arabs to that of their brothers outside the state of Israel.

In one of my conversations with Gershon Knispel, the latter mentioned the influences of German art on the choice to represent mourning through women figures. Knispel noted the influence of the tradition of mourning representations in

13 This stereotype, however, is not perceived by the Palestinian cultural communities as a post-modern text; for them the art and literary works are a faithful copy of an endangered tradition.

the drawing and sculpture of Käthe Kollwitz,¹⁴ for instance in the *Grieving Parents* monument.¹⁵ Abdi and Knispel thus sought to undermine the hegemonic construction of the Palestinian cultural heritage that puts the metaphoric woman in its center, and create a different unifying narrative that gives central place to the woman figure not as a fantasmatic, bigger-than-life figure, but as a realistic popular heroine who represents the concrete man-land link in the Palestinian cultural heritage that crystallized after '48. Furthermore, The Monument wishes to constitute one station on the continuum of "memorials that have become monuments in the villages of Sakhnin, Kafr Qasim, Tantura, and Dier Yassin" (Abdi 1978), a continuum that reflects the land as a real and specific territory that has been lost and is now an object of memory.

Solidarity as the universal element in constructing cultural heritage

Along with the particular motif of the land, the monument's portrayal of the man-land relations displays the influence of the tradition of socialist-realist commemoration and grieving, which bears a universal character. The socialist-realist movement, and in its local version – social realism – put more stress on the utopian, aspired-to reality, than on the real, existing one. The utopia was borne on the shoulders of the "simple man": the worker, the soldier, and the peasant who were presented as the ideal types of the harmonious reality that would benefit the collective. This universal-total vision was based on the deliberate blurring of the boundaries between high and low, and on a syntax that combined abstract elements with concrete human representations. The Israeli artists who worked in this genre saw themselves as a vanguard and as social leaders who aspired to use their art to advance a social revolution and its utopian realization (Ofrat 2015). The socialist or social-realist tradition¹⁶ lives side by side with the heroic-monumental representation that char-

14 Käthe Kollwitz was a German printmaker, painter, and sculptor. Her work expressed the suffering experienced by downtrodden workers during the second Reich and between the two World Wars. Her affinity with socialism and pacifism led to her persecution by the Nazis.

15 The monument was created to commemorate Peter, Käthe Kollwitz's youngest son, who was killed in the First World War in October 1914. Kollwitz created a monument that carried no artist's signature and no mention of place or time, in an attempt to create a timeless memorial that opposed the existence of war. The monument shows a mother, father, and their son engaged in an embrace, a posture that is both intimate and universal.

16 A distinction should be made between social realism and socialist realism. While the first dealt with social issues in a realistic style, the latter is marked by the socialist and Marxist-communist teleology and propaganda. Thus, we can find social realist artists as early as the middle of the 19th century, whereas socialist-realist art, which started to appear after the Soviet revolution of 1917, became the official art of the Soviet Union under Stalin in 1932 and reached its summit in the 1950s under the reign of Zhdanov. On the two terms and the distinction between them, see: Cullerne and Taylor (1993).

acterizes many of the memorials in Israel. The characteristics of the socialist tradition are present mainly in monuments that were erected after the 1967 war (Levinger 1993; Shamir 1996),¹⁷ and in whose design Knispel took part.¹⁸ The socialist or social-realist tradition found expression in the monuments in the formal language of geometrical shapes, and in the direct character of the figures. It is further typified by using stone reliefs next to a plaque naming the fallen. The visual echoes of this tendency can be found in The Monument in the way the figures are represented, in their social roles, and in the stone, reliefs listing the names of those killed.

The notion of the land as a universal dimension is also evident in the narrative that was written especially for the monument's catalogue by Samih el-Qasim and Joshua Sobol, and in the texts written by the artists themselves. Samih el-Qasim writes (1978, unnumbered):

'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.' For hundreds of years man has recited these wise words. For the fellah, who is umbilically tied to his land, this verse has a different meaning, which brings together matter and spirit. When his land is in danger, the peasant is crushed under the weight of the feeling that he is about to lose his entire world. To protect the fruits of his labor the peasant is willing to sacrifice the essence of his blood. This reveals the identity between blood and land [...]. We are not living on another planet, and our history is not detached from the global history: we are an inextricable part of it. The racism and hatred will pass, the national oppression will disappear, the killing will stop, while man will triumph, and love will overcome. Left will be man, the land, and the lesson.

This text puts human solidarity in its center, though el-Qasim also emphasizes "the identity between blood and land" and the fact that the Palestinians are not "living on another planet," an allusion to the writer and holocaust survivor Yehiel De-Nur's

17 In Israel we can find expressions of both movements, sometimes in mixed fashion. Despite the common tendency to label the art of Israeli artists who at one stage or another were close to the leftist parties as socialist realism, I believe that the term social realism is more apt in this context. In fact, Socialist Realism at its best or worst can more readily be identified in state commemoration projects, such as the monument at Kibbutz Yad Mordechai, or in election posters of parties such as *Mapai*, *Mapam* and of course *Maki* from the period leading to the late 1960s. This is especially manifested in foregrounding the achievements of the young state in the fields of agriculture and economy, and in idealizing and monumentalizing the subject – "The New Man" or "New Jew", and elevating the revolutionary subject, the working man.

18 Apart from The Monument, Knispel designed several other monuments for the fallen IDF soldiers in the 1970s: the monument at the Galim Youth Village (1970); the monument at the Ahuza neighborhood in Haifa (1974); the monument at the Memorial Garden in Haifa (1975) (Shamir 1996).

definition of the life of European Jews during the holocaust.¹⁹ In addition, the monument cites a paraphrase on the immortal line: “in their death they willed us life” taken from the poem “Should You Wish to Know the Source” written by Israel’s national poet, H. N. Bialik. The combination of the Hebrew text and the text written in Arabic echoes the universal message that the monument seeks to convey. Transcribing the messages from one language to another, and from one society to another, seems to wish to say that memory is not history and objects of memory are raw material that acquires interpretation in light of the contexts in which it appears (Ohaha and Wistrich 1996). Creating the narrative and visual link that intercrosses the Jewish culture and the Arab one locates the monument outside the zero-sum game that makes one side redundant for the sake of the other, while highlighting the universal dimension of grieving and bereavement and emphasizing the aspiration for them to no longer recur. (Fig. 3) Moreover, on the back of the monument there is a sentence in three languages Hebrew, Arabic, and English reading: “created by A. Abdi and G. Knispel for deepening the understanding between the two peoples.” This sentence reflects the ideology of the then-dominant communist party (Sorek 2008). Even though this sentence has never reappeared on any Palestinian monument, and even though a sentence like this could never appear on a monument dedicated to the fallen IDF soldiers, the request for coexistence further reflects the universal wish for peace embedded in the monument.

Afterword

Studies from the last years that engage with the issue of collective memory point to the existence of a multiple memory, the product of negotiations and haggling between different memories that strive to represent the nation (Confino 1997). As a “multiple entity”, the collective memory and the cultural heritage that maintains this memory is a dynamic process that attests to the situation of the collective in the present, its attitude towards the past, and its affinity for the future. Moreover, the role of the monument among the Palestinian minority in Israel carries additional meanings, since the monument and the ceremonial events that take place alongside it serve to distinguish the Palestinian group from the Jewish group in Israel, as well as to distinguish the Palestinian group from the Palestinians in the diaspora (Sorek 2015).

19 In his testimony in the Eichmann trial, De-Nur defined life in Auschwitz as life on “another planet”, where time was not the same as on earth, where the inhabitants had no names, parents or children, and mainly, where they did not live or die as on earth. In time De-Nur retracted this definition and explained that the Jews were not murdered on “another planet” but here on earth (Segev 2001).

What can we learn, then, from the ways in which the monument represents the Land Day events and the cultural heritage of Palestinians in Israel? The general impression fostered by the monument with its two parts is of mixing the local and specific with the placeless and universal. Processing the memory of the past from both a particular and a universal point of view intercrosses the longing for the lost Palestine with the dimension of a Jewish-Arab partnership. This intercrossing, which ostensibly seems like an unresolvable tension or a contradiction, represents a social-realist approach. It is a simultaneous call to strengthen the link to the land and to the shared heritage, and to establish a coexistence. Social-cultural fields that feature majority-minority relations and ethnic-national tensions are characterized by this twofold nature. In the troubled space between “Belonging” and “Otherness”, the need arises to preserve particular characteristics as well as to strive to normalize the group’s positioning within the national majority group. The monument to commemorate the Land Day events therefore represents a turning point. The monument represents the wish to make visible the particular identity and cultural heritage, while at the same time trying to make visible the positioning of the minority group within the dominant national majority. By presenting the memory of the past and the aspirations for the future, the monument serves as a bridge between groups and between different historical times. Instead of seeing it as a field of struggle between contrasting social and political forces, it can be seen as a visual and material opportunity to create something shared that derives precisely from the pain and the grief. This attempt is no longer present in the Israeli and Palestinian field of commemoration in Israel.

Bibliography

- Abdi, A., & Knispel, G. (Eds.) (1978). *A story of a monument: Land Day in Saknin 1976–1978*. [package] Arabesk. [in Hebrew]
- Almog, O. (2000). *The sabra: The creation of the new Jew*. University of California press.
- Amit, G. (2008). “You will build and we will destroy”: Art as a rescue excavation. *Sedek*, 117–192. [in Hebrew]
- Ankory, G. (2006). *Palestinian art*. Reaktion Books.
- Andersen, P.D., & Wendt, S. (Eds.) (2015). *Masculinity and the nation in the modern world: Between hegemony and marginalization*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Anderson, B. (1999). *Imagined communities: Reflection on the origins and spread of nationalism*. Verso.
- Balas, G. (1989). *Social realism in the political in the fifties, political art in the nineties*. The New Haifa Museum. [in Hebrew]
- Balas, S. (1970). The Arab literature after June 1967. *Keshet*, 12(3), 63–89. [in Hebrew]
- Ben Zvi, T. (2004). *Between nation and gender: The representation of the female body in Palestinian Art*. Thesis. Tel Aviv University. [in Hebrew]

- Ben Zvi, T., & Farah, H. (Eds.) (2008). *Men in the sun*. Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art.
- Ben Zvi, T. (2010). *Abed Abdi, 50 years of creativity*. Umm el-Fahem Gallery. [in Hebrew]
- Ben Zvi, T. (2014). *Sabra: Contemporary Palestinian art*. Resling. [in Hebrew]
- Boullata, K. (1989). Palestinian expression inside a cultural ghetto. *Middle East Report*, 159, 24–28.
- Boullata, K. (2000). Art. In P. Mattar (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians* (pp. 81–90). Facts on File.
- Boullata, K. (2001). The world, the self and the body: Pioneering women in Palestinian art. In T. Ben Zvi and Y. Lerer (Eds.). *Self-portrait: Palestinian women's art* (pp. 9–48). Andalus. [in Hebrew]
- Boullata, K. (2009). *Palestinian art, 1850–2005*. Saqi.
- Confino, A. (1997). *The Nation as a local metaphor: Wurttemberg, imperial Germany, and national memory, 1871–1918*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Cullerne, M. B., & Taylor, B. (Eds.) (1993). *Art of the Soviets: Painting, sculpture and architecture in a one-party state, 1917–1992*. Manchester University Press.
- El-Qasim, S. (1978). Blood and land. In A. Abdi and G. Knispel (Eds.). *A story of a monument: Land Day in Saknin 1976–1978* (no page numbers). [package] Arabesk. [in Hebrew]
- Foucault, M. (1984). Space, knowledge, and power. In P. Rabinow (Ed.). *Foucault reader* (pp. 239–256). Pantheon Books.
- Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and nationality*. Cornell University Press.
- Gershoni, I., & Jankowski, J. P. (1986). *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs: The search for Egyptian nationhood, 1900–1930*. Oxford University Press.
- Ghanem, A. (2001). *The Palestinian-Arab minority in Israel, 1948–2000: A political study*. State University of New York Press.
- Gillis, J. R. (1994). *Commemorations: The politics of national identity*. Princeton University Press.
- Hassan, M. (2018). *Hidden from the eye – Palestinian women and cities*. Hakibutz Hameuhad and Van Leer Institute. [in Hebrew]
- Jamal, A. (2004). Between homeland nation and state: Patriotism among the Palestinian minority in Israel. In A. Ben Amos and D. Bar-Tal (Eds.). *Patriotism, homeland love* (pp. 399–452). Tel Aviv University [in Hebrew]
- Levinger, E. (1993). *War memorials and the fallen in Israel*. Hakibutz Hameuhad. [in Hebrew]
- Lustick, I. (1980). *Arabs in the Jewish state: Israel's control of a national minority*. University of Texas Press.
- Mosse, L. G. (1990). *Fallen soldiers: Reshaping the memory of the world wars*. Oxford University Press.
- Niv, A. (1974 13, February). *Zo Haderekh*, p. 28. [in Hebrew]
- Nora, P. (1989). *Realms of memory: Conflicts and divisions*. Gallimard. [in French]

- Ofrat, G. (2015). Between “realism” and “social”. *The shed of Gideon Ofrat*. <https://gideonofrat.wordpress.com/2015/12/14> [in Hebrew]
- Ohana, D., & Wistrich, R.S. (Eds.) (1996). *Transfigurations of Israeli consciousness myth and memory*. Hakibutz Hameuhad and Van Leer Institute. [in Hebrew]
- Rabinowitz, D. (1993). Oriental nostalgia – How did the Palestinians become the Arabs of Israel? *Theory and Criticism* 4, 141–151. [in Hebrew]
- Renan, E. [1882] (2018). *What is a nation?* Columbia University Press.
- Segev, T. (2001 23, July). The author Yehiel De-Nur has died but Ka-Tsetnik will live forever. *Haaretz*, p. 24.
- Sensier, A. (1881). *Jean-François Millet, peasant and painter*. Macmillan.
- Shammout, I. (1989). *Art in Palestine*. Kuwait.
- Shamir, I. (1996). *Commemoration and remembrance, Israel's way of molding its collective memory patterns*. Am Oved. [in Hebrew]
- Sorek, T. (2008). Cautious commemoration: Localism, communalism, and nationalism in Palestinian memorial monument in Israel. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50(2), 337–368.
- Sorek, T. (2015). *Palestinian Commemoration in Israel*. Stanford University Press.
- Sweedenberg, T. (1990). The Palestinian peasant as national signifier. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 63(1), 18–30.
- Tamari, V., & Johnson, P. (1995). Loss and vision: Representations of women in Palestinian art under occupation, In A. Moors (Ed.). *Discourse and Palestine: Power, text and context* (pp 24–28), Het Spinhuis.
- Winter, J., & Sivan, E. (1999). *War and remembrance in the twentieth century*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zerubavel, Y. (1994). *Recovered roots: Collective memory and the making of Israeli national tradition*. Chicago University Press.
- Zohar, A. (2008). It doesn't compliment me or the state. *Reshet* 13, <https://13tv.co.il/item/entertainment/art/ntr-600807/> [in Hebrew]

