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Stories of Dual Isolation and Confinement: Disability Under Occupation in Palestine¹

Abstract

This paper analyzes the documentary *Defying My Disability* by Ramzi Maqdisi, which reveals the complexities of disability, occupation, and isolation in Palestine. The film profiles seven disabled Palestinians who share their hopes, fears, joys, and dreams as they negotiate life in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza and offer perspectives about their dual confinement and isolation. Palestinians, disabled or not, collectively experience limited mobility due to checkpoints and other everyday experiences of occupation. The experience of disability in Palestine is inextricably entangled with the experience of occupation; to be a Palestinian in the West Bank and Gaza is to live a life of confinement and isolation from the outside world. The film exemplifies the role of media in amplifying the voices of disabled individuals, like those in this documentary, whose stories are largely unheard on the global landscape.

Defying My Disability, a documentary by Palestinian artist, actor, writer, and filmmaker Ramzi Maqdisi, features seven Palestinian children and young adults, ages 7 to 28, who share their hopes, fears, joys, and dreams as they negotiate life with a disability in the occupied West Bank and Gaza². Depicting the intersections of occupation, disability, and danger through interviews, images, and visual metaphors, the 2016 documentary reveals the power of film not only to portray Palestinian stories but also to transcend the isolation resulting from both disability and the occupation of Palestine. The Covid pandemic brought isolation, fear and hardship to the whole world. When we asked Maqdisi about the experience of the pandemic in Palestine, he observed that the isolation felt by people across the globe as a result of the pandemic was a taste of the ordinary life experience of Palestinians. He paused, and said quietly, “I don’t think the pandemic was worse than the occupation.”

The authors of this paper – two Jewish, one Christian – are deeply aware of the importance of interrogating our own positionality with respect to this work. Each of us is a teacher educator; two of us have a background in disability studies (DS) and disability studies in education (DSE); one of us is an applied theatre practitioner, and one of us is a linguist with experience organizing for a Free Palestine. Prior to our study, not one of us had encountered conversations about disability in Palestine, even though the percentage of people

with disabilities in Palestine is among the highest in the world.³ Our lack of exposure is no doubt related to the scant representation of Palestine in western media and scholarship in general. For example, a special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly*, “The State of Disability in Israel/Palestine,” contains not a single article “written by Palestinians or directly dealing with the state of disability in the occupied territories”.⁴ The editors explain: “This significant lacuna was related to many logistical and political circumstances”. Laura Jaffe notes that disabled Palestinians have been “effaced from the purview of disability studies”, and she attributes this omission to failure of the discipline to recognize Israel as a settler-colonial state”.⁵

Our experience, 15 years after that special issue, reflects the global presence of social media and online platforms. We discovered this film unexpectedly at a virtual screening and talk-back held by the Palestine Museum US in Woodbridge, Connecticut. Afterwards we contacted the filmmaker via social media, which resulted in a series of ongoing virtual conversations. With Maqdisi’s consent, we recorded interviews focused on the film itself and on his process creating it, as well as his perspectives on disability, occupation, and life in Palestine. Excerpts from these conversations appear throughout the paper. In addition to engaging the filmmaker in multiple conversations, we spoke virtually with a Palestinian special education teacher from Ramallah, participated in Palestinian-led virtual workshops (about topics

such as disability studies (DS), disability in Palestine, and ethics for conducting research in Palestine) and arranged virtual meetings with other Palestinians whose work we have read or watched.

The seven children and young adults with disabilities who we meet in the documentary describe joys and sorrows, challenges and triumphs, isolation and connections. Four of the seven (Abed Alrahman Abu Rawah, Haneen Abu Ayash, Mohamed Sadah, and Idriss Awad) live in the West Bank, and three live in Gaza (Zyad Deeb, Anas Abu Haloub, and Muna Sayed). Maqdisi explains that unlike other films for which an entire script is written, he prepared just 10 questions in advance of conducting and filming interviews; in this way, he says, the individuals speak for themselves. Moreover, Maqdisi foregrounds his subjects' experience of disability rather than the explicit militarized violence they experience under occupation. *Defying My Disability* challenges western stereotypes of Palestinians as backward and uncivilized⁶ as well as threatening.⁷ The 46-minute documentary, produced by Al Jazeera, is freely available on YouTube.

While the narratives in *Defying My Disability* are not necessarily representative of all disabled Palestinians, they do introduce themes and threads that represent shared social dynamics and realities within Palestine. Every individual in the film faces hardships and isolation in multiple and intersecting ways, along with moments of joy and beauty.

Disabled Palestinians: Stories of Dual Isolation and Confinement

Isolation in *Defying My Disability* is complex, as is disability. It is important to note that the experience of disability in Palestine is inextricably entangled with the experience of occupation. To be a Palestinian in the West Bank and Gaza is to live a life of confinement and isolation from the outside world. Palestinians, disabled or not, collectively experience limited mobility due to checkpoints and other everyday experiences of occupation. Five individuals in the documentary offer perspectives about their *dual* confinement and isolation as disabled Palestinians.

The first person who speaks in the film is 25-year-old Haneen Abu Ayash, sitting outside on a swing. Haneen removes her headphones in preparation for the interview. A light breeze moves

her shoulder-length hair while she speaks looking off into the distance. Perhaps it is her choice not to look into the camera, against footage of an expanse beyond where she sits, that evokes an aura of loneliness. She begins by speaking about education and employment as a disabled person:

I have a diploma in secretarial studies. I'm studying hair and beauty in the Sheikha Fatima Rehabilitation Centre...I wanted to work as a secretary, but my applications were rejected, or people weren't hiring.

Despite her preparation in secretarial studies, Haneen currently attends beauty school because her applications for secretarial jobs were rejected. However, Al Jazeera's YouTube description of the film reveals that Haneen was not hired as a secretary "because of a speech impediment",⁸ which appears to be related to what Haneen describes as an oxygen deficiency at birth. Later in the interview, Haneen clearly demonstrates her awareness of discriminatory employment practices toward disabled people:

Do I have to stay home if I have a problem and not claim my rights from society? Shouldn't I claim my right to employment just because of my oxygen deficiency? On the contrary. Someone who is partly disabled should work for self-fulfillment and to support themselves.

Haneen recognizes that treating disabled people as unemployable is yet another example of social injustice. She rejects being confined and isolated at home because of discriminatory hiring practices. It is worth noting that her personal conceptualization of disability in terms of the *right* to employment and self-fulfillment (in contrast to conceptualizing disability as an individual problem or burden) is highly compatible with the current work of disability studies scholars.⁹

Haneen also speaks passionately about her deferred dreams as a young disabled Palestinian:

My dream is to fulfill myself. I want to be like other girls. Without problems. Society doesn't allow people like

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us to have these kinds of dreams. Dreams are limited in our society. It's forbidden to dream. If we have a problem, we're not allowed to dream like them. We don't have the right to dream as they do. Is it wrong to feel that I'm like everyone else? It's *not* wrong to exercise my right or to know that I'm like the rest of the people.

Haneen squarely locates “the problem” not within disabled bodies but rather within society. She rejects public perception of disabled people as “not like the rest of the people” as well as the imposed limitations placed upon an individual's dreams because of disability status. When Haneen says, “Dreams are limited in our society,” she is referring to Palestinian society as a whole, including not only disabled people like herself, but also all Palestinians living under occupation. Her dreams are limited both by life under occupation, and as a result of her disability. Yasmin Snounu quotes a Palestinian professor who observes, “the occupation does not have a role in disability, rather the occupation is disability”.¹⁰ Haneen alludes to this dual confinement and isolation when she laments: “I'd love to go to Jaffa, Jerusalem, Gaza. I wish I could go to places I've never seen before. But I don't have a permit or anything from the occupation's side.”

Zyad Deeb, a 28-year-old artist and photographer, is the sole interviewee in the documentary who acquired a disability later in life. As a college student studying fine arts in his last semester, Zyad lost both legs in an explosion caused by rockets fired on Gaza by the Israeli military. Eleven of his family members died that day, and Zyad's legs were buried together with his father and brother. Zyad completed his degree at home, isolated from his former peers.

Zyad offers his perspective about living within the context of the occupation as a disabled person:

I want to travel. I think of traveling outside Gaza for one reason only. That's to be able to move and go to places freely and easily. This doesn't exist in Gaza, of course. Gaza is not equipped for disabled people.

Zyad's perspective clearly identifies the relationship between mobility disabilities and limitations of

geographic mobility imposed upon Palestinians. Echoing Haneen's earlier claims to her rights as a disabled person, Zyad likewise frames the mobility limitations imposed upon Palestinians in terms of rights: “My dream is to go to Jerusalem, but Israel won't allow me to. It's my right as a Palestinian to enter Jerusalem but the Israelis don't allow me to.”

Mohamed Sadah, a young man with a mobility disability, also speaks to the themes of confinement and isolation:

If I had legs, I'd be able to move, hang out with friends and have fun. But this is God's will. Mostly, I would like to go to places in Palestine. Another thing is to go for Umrah [an Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca].

It seems Mohamed has internalized religious and medicalized framings of disability. He accepts “God's will” as the reason for his disability, even though his condition precludes him from hanging out with friends and having fun like “ordinary” people.

Internalization of the medicalized framing of “disability as deficit” and isolation from non-disabled peers are likewise evident in stories told by the children in the documentary. Anas Abu Haloub, a boy who uses a manual wheelchair, shares a rather bleak assessment of his life: “I feel sad and cry about my condition. It bothers me when people push me and try to help me. I can't play football. I stay seated or crawl. I can only play basketball.” Later in the documentary, Anas is filmed hoisting himself from his wheelchair to the top of an end table, eventually settling himself at a gated window ledge. While looking out the window, Anas reflects:

I get bored. I sit for half-an-hour or an hour at the window watching the children playing football and marbles. I watch them passing the ball and playing bottle cap games. If someone walks by, a president, someone from the resistance, a gunman — I watch where they are going.

Anas is a keen observer of life happening on the outside—yet life outside the window mirrors his confinement and isolation on the inside.

Muna Sayed, a cheerful 12-year-old girl who

uses a manual wheelchair, echoes the peer isolation that Anas describes: “I sit and play alone. I don’t have friends.” When the interviewer questions her about not having any friends, Muna replies, “I do but they don’t accept playing with me.” She is unable to explain why this is the case, but she explains that she no longer attends school. While the film highlights her affectionate and deep connection with her older brother, increased isolation from her peers has occurred because it has become too difficult to use her manual wheelchair to get to school and her family cannot take her to school every day.

Several interviewees comment about the impact of inaccessibility upon their daily living in Palestine, in what Al Jazeera World calls “places ill-equipped to handle special needs”.¹¹ Following some footage of Mohamed slowly climbing a staircase using his hands and arms to hoist himself upward, he talks about both his challenges with inaccessibility and his dreams for accessibility:

My place needs electrical equipment. I see people who have stairlifts. They help them go up steps. It would be better for me to have one at home. I climb up the stairs on my hands. By the time I get up here, my hands are really tired. I get tired very quickly...I want to go up to my apartment without getting tired by climbing the stairs. I need a wheelchair with a remote control because this one is driving me crazy. I want to renovate this house and sit on the stairs just watching, so when I ask someone to bring me the wheelchair to go to the shop, they would. The building would only have two steps. Then we’d only need to build the roof and life would be so easy.

Other interviewees confirm Mohamed’s perspective on the state of inaccessibility in Palestine. For example, Zyad says, “Gaza is beautiful to its people. I can say I want to get out of Gaza, that it’s not nice, that life here is difficult. The reality of living in Gaza is hard for a disabled person.” Likewise, Muna laments the limitations of her manual wheelchair and dreams of accessibility: “If I had an electric wheelchair, I’d go to school to continue studying.”

Occupation, Danger, and Disability

The individuals featured in the film are isolated not only by mobility challenges, but also as a result of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Lara Friedman describes Israel’s apparent intentions with new regulations that govern the entry of all visitors to the West Bank: “I keep coming back to the sense of isolation; the idea here is through various means to isolate Palestinians from the outside world”.¹² Yasmin Snounu describes the ways in which Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are not only isolated, but also confined and debilitated, with what she calls a triple matrix of maiming.¹³ In the first instance, Israel has impunity to target the Palestinian body, in the name of what they call self-defense. Another layer of debility is created by the second level of the matrix, which is the “Israeli destruction of Palestinian infrastructure, such as bombing Gaza and demolishing homes and schools in the West Bank”.¹⁴ The third part of the matrix is the physical barriers that Israel imposes “that impact Palestinians in general and disabled Palestinians in particular”.¹⁵ Jasbir Puar describes “the debilitating infrastructure of the occupation itself: *the very fact of* checkpoints, divided highways, illegal settlements that fragment Palestinian transit, inability to get medical equipment repaired, dearth of medical supplies, deterioration of medical infrastructure”.¹⁶

Watching the film, it is impossible to know the extent to which limited medical infrastructure has led to or exacerbated any of the disabilities depicted. And while the film does not focus on political issues, the interconnectedness of disability and the occupation is apparent. Militarized checkpoints and the apartheid wall, both of which separate Palestinians in the West Bank from their families, their schools, hospitals, and even their own land, form the quiet background of the film. Checkpoints are dangerous to all Palestinians, and especially so to those with disabilities who may not hear instructions from soldiers, or who may respond in an unexpected way. In fact, the Palestinian Authority, a governing body that has partial administrative and security responsibility over some parts of the West Bank, allows families of K-12 students with disabilities to be home-schooled, so that their disabled children do not have to pass through Israeli checkpoints.¹⁷

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Several interviewees relate stories about their increased vulnerability as disabled persons living in a militarized context. Haneen describes a recent close encounter with armed soldiers:

There was a protest. I don't know what was going on. I was just minding my own business. A soldier got out of his car and said, "Come." I didn't understand. Then a second soldier came and said, "Come." I didn't understand. Both soldiers loaded their guns, wanting to shoot me. Then I understood and changed direction when he waved to me...

Although there is not more information about her condition, it is possible that she may have difficulty quickly processing information as evident in her story. In this scenario, disability could easily have cost her life.¹⁸

In talking about his desire to travel, Ziad recognizes that even if he could travel as a Palestinian there would be enhanced danger because he is an amputee.

I can't go. I say, "I really like to go," as if I've been there but I never have. Do you understand? I think that I have to be there, but I'm not there. There are beautiful things that I'm far away from. I can't reach them. First of all, I have an injury. If the Israelis started shooting, I wouldn't be able to move from my place. If anyone else went there, they might manage or even get hurt. But what if I go there?

Ziad understands that his vulnerability as a disabled man is greater than a Palestinian without a disability. Ziad expresses fear about his inability to escape an attack by Israeli soldiers, should he visit the border of Gaza. Like other residents of Gaza, Ziad is confined to the 141 square mile enclave. (Permits to leave Gaza are at the discretion of the Israeli government, and it is difficult to obtain them, even for medical purposes.¹⁹)

Abed Alrahman Abu Rawah, a philosophical 17-year-old born in Gaza with a single arm and leg, reflects on his vulnerability as a disabled person during what he refers to as the 2009 war on Gaza:

I felt afraid. Everyone feels afraid. I prepared myself for dying at any second, from a stray shell or random shots. I was afraid. But to think about running away, I didn't. Like they say you only die once. What if we'd run away? Would that mean we wouldn't die? We're going to die anyway. There's no way to escape that. Where would we go? Tanks were right here, surrounding us. Where would you run to? You can only stay at home. I'm telling you, you can only die once. You can't escape death.

Visual Metaphors of Occupation and Isolation

In the documentary, the Sea and the Wall are both characters in their own right; they represent isolation and dreams born of isolation, and are included verbally and visually as pillars of both limitation and hope. The opening and closing images of the film are of the Mediterranean Sea. More than 170 miles of its coastline and some of the most beautiful beaches in the world lie just miles away from the West Bank, but these places are off-limits to Palestinians who must obtain a permit from the Israeli authorities to travel there, and then must pass through checkpoints, often with lengthy wait times, to reach the Sea.

Haneen has spent her life dreaming about the Sea, but she says, "I don't have a permit or anything from the occupation's side. It's closed. I've never been to the sea." When Haneen visits the Sea for the first time, the viewer is presented with visuals of the intersection of mobility restrictions, occupation, isolation, and dreams. As a Palestinian born in the West Bank, she does not have the paperwork necessary to pass through checkpoints in order to reach it. Maqdisi shared with us that he and his film crew brought her to a checkpoint with a hidden camera, without permission, expecting to expose the military state violence that is inflicted upon people living in the West Bank and the restrictions of their movements across militarized lines. To his surprise, they were let through with no issues, resulting in Haneen's first ever visit to the Sea. Maqdisi was solemn as he reflected on this moment with us. On this day a missile was launched from Gaza and landed in the Sea outside

Tel Aviv. It landed right behind where they were filming, but Maqdisi made the decision not to include that in the documentary. He also shared that he had footage of Ziyad's home being bombed and the death of his family members, but did not include that either. Instead, Maqdisi foregrounds the experience of his participants in this film. "I didn't want to put all this, because, you know, once you put anything like that, you'll miss the story... for me was Haneen and the Sea, and the story of the Sea...." To be sure, Haneen loves the Sea that she is restricted from visiting: "I'd come here every day if I lived here. I'd sit for hours, bring a paper, write on it, and throw it away."

As mentioned earlier, Haneen's disability and the military state converge to create a hyper-dangerous experience for her. Ziyad shares the same worry, mentioning dreams of travel and movement being squashed due to his physical immobility.

The Sea also figures prominently in the stories from Gaza, a small strip of land bordering the Mediterranean on the west, Egypt on the south, and Israel on the east. One of the most densely populated places in the world with over 2 million residents, most of them refugees from land that is now the state of Israel, Gaza is just 25 miles long and, in some areas, about 6 miles wide. Gaza was captured from Egypt in the 1967 War, and although Israel withdrew all its troops and settlers in 2005, it enforces a land, air, and sea blockade, controlling everything that goes into and comes out of the small enclave, including water, food, and electricity. Most Gazans live in dire poverty and are rarely allowed to leave, which is why Gaza is called the world's largest open-air prison.

In contrast to Palestinians in the West Bank, Ziyad and others living in Gaza do have access



Figure 1. Haneen finally reaches the Sea: "I'd come here every day if I lived here. I'd sit for hours, bring a paper, write on it, then throw it away."

to the Sea. Ziyad says, "To me, the sea is space and the far horizon. I love going to the sea. Every time I'm there, I see things even further away than usual. In the sea, a distant boat passes and I feel there's still a road ahead of me."

However, the Sea in Gaza is also a border that restricts mobility. With 25 miles of coastline, Gaza has beaches, but it does not have a port; so instead of facilitating movement and travel, it acts as another side of the cage that is the Gazan perimeter. Ziyad observes, "Thank God we still have the sea. Gaza's sea is under siege. [The other day] I sat in a chair, on the shore and saw the [Israeli] gunboats. I saw the battleships, far away. After sunset, Israeli spotlights flashed on us. When I saw the light I got scared. It felt like there was an eye watching us."

Anas Abu Haloub, a schoolboy in Gaza, says, "I watch the sea, the fishermen and see how they catch fish. This is how I have fun. While I'm at the beach I feel as if I'm swimming, walking on my feet just extremely happy sitting by the sea." One of the last scenes of the film is Anas at the beach watching the waves roll in and out. Eventually he is lifted out of his chair, carried to the water, and lowered just



Figure 2. The separation barrier, also known as the apartheid wall, limits the mobility of all Palestinians

enough for his hand to touch the wet sand and waves.

Another important character in the film is the Wall, a large, looming presence throughout the West Bank. Known variously as the apartheid wall, the racial segregation wall, and the separation barrier, the Wall appears in the film as a restricting and isolating structure. Although Israel asserts that it is a necessary security measure, in 2004 the United Nations declared the wall to be illegal under international law.²⁰ Currently over 500 miles long and still under construction, the barrier snakes throughout the West Bank, separating Palestinians not only from territory claimed by Israel, but also from each other.²¹

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It includes large concrete blocks, as well as trenches, armed fences, barbed wire, watchtowers, drones, snipers, and surveillance technology.²²

In one scene, we see 7-year-old Idriss Awaad slowly and painstakingly pull himself along a small parapet, using only his upper body to get to his uncle's home. Breathing heavily, he tells us he has "only fifty minutes left," and later explains, "there were many times I was about to fall." This scene is followed by one of another boy the same age carrying a Palestinian flag, walking alongside the Wall, which - in the manner of many children everywhere - he then climbs. We see the boy catch his foot in one of the seams between the enormous concrete blocks to scale the Wall and reach the top; once there, he peers at the other side, which is not shown on camera. The film focuses on the boy and his actions, but the imagery suggests something much larger: the view at the top is of the vast lands and experiences he is restricted from. This scene represents both the real physical and geopolitical barriers that are imposed on Palestinians, as well as Palestinian resistance and



Figure 3. Peering over the wall, one of the physical barriers imposed on all Palestinians, to the vast lands and experiences on the other side.

desire to overcome those barriers of isolation.

Another evocative image in the film is an abandoned playground in the West Bank, in which the remains of a small creaky merry-go-round swing rotate in the wind. At one time, the structure had multiple swings, and a motor that powered it. Maqdisi explains that this abandoned equipment is representative of life in Palestine: a structure, probably purchased by a non-governmental organization (NGO), may have been destroyed or stolen, perhaps by settlers. Or maybe the NGO simply didn't plan for future maintenance, so the shiny new toy functioned only temporarily. The transition to the next scene is even more arresting:

the round shape of the abandoned merry-go-round fades into an image of the 'rain of fire,' white phosphorous bombs exploding in the air above Gaza during the Israeli offensive referred to as Operation Cast Lead in 2008-2009.²³ In violation of international law, the Israeli military used these bombs, which immolate everything they touch.²⁴ So in these brief seconds of the film, we see multiple



Figure 4. Multiple types of destruction: an abandoned playground in the West Bank fades to an image of a phosphorous bomb fired by Israel into Gaza during Operation Cast Lead (2008-2009)

types of destruction in the West Bank and Gaza.

Dreams and Isolation

Dreams are often thought of as liberatory, as leading us to a future of what is possible. But what if dreams are unable to be actualized? What if dreams impede happiness because of their impossibility? Nearly everyone in the film talks about their dreams. 12-year-old Muna expresses a strong desire to become a first-grade teacher. She says she's a happy person, even though she says "I sit and play alone." She also laments, "I've stopped dreaming." The relationship between isolation, dreaming, the occupation, and disability is a complex and troubled one. What if dreaming furthers a feeling of isolation? The intersections of occupation and disability seem to further isolation through the quelling of dreams.

Maqdisi also reflected on the relationship between the Sea, the occupation, and dreams. He questions whether it was a mistake to bring Haneen to the Sea. When we asked him why, he said, "Because now she's remembering, you know, because sometimes if you taste something, it's hard to tell you 'Stop, quit!' If you didn't taste it, maybe it will continue as a dream, but you don't know the taste of it." Dreams are so impeded in Palestine that even the filmmaker worries

about realizing a dream that is so dissonant from the reality of those living under occupation.

Several of the people in the film have dreams of better assistive technology to increase their mobility. Anas spoke about needing a wheelchair with remote control. Muna also dreams of accessibility: "If I had an electric wheelchair, I'd go to school to continue studying." Mohamed shares that his building needs electrical equipment and a stairlift; at present he climbs the stairs with his hands.

The people in front of the camera in the documentary are not the only ones with dreams impacted by isolation under occupation. Maqdisi shared with us that there are producers and platforms who are eager to work with him, but only in the interest of telling both Israeli and Palestinian stories. This example is emblematic of a larger isolation in film and media representation: Palestinians are isolated through a requirement to compromise their stories, humanity, and values in service of a "both sides" narrative. It is important to note that this "both sides" compulsory condition is not present for Israeli stories and narratives in global media. There are abundant examples of

Israeli stories being foregrounded without any Palestinian counterpart or collaboration, and the special journal issue, "The State of Disability in Israel/Palestine," is just one example. The isolation of disabled Palestinian narratives happens not only through physical and material experiences under military occupation, but also under media refusal to amplify, fund, or turn the lens on Palestinian voices without "two sides of the story" strings attached.

There is a popular African proverb that "until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter."²⁵ In this case, it is not that the lion does not know how to write, but that the lion's writings are sanctioned, isolated, and barred from public access. Challenging media isolation of disabled Palestinian narratives is a collective endeavor and responsibility. While *Defying My Disability* documents the significant mobility challenges (physical and geographical) and isolation in both the West Bank and Gaza, the medium of film generates mobility and connection through its capacity to bring stories to a global audience.

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Lilly Padía was raised in an interfaith, Russian-Jewish, white and Mexican-American family in a predominantly Black city. She attended public schools in Oakland, California from kindergarten to 12th grade, where the legacy of the Black Panther Party shaped her approach to education as liberation. She comes to Chicago by way of the Bronx, New York, where she taught grades K-8 as a certified bilingual special education teacher and instructional coach. She worked as an adjunct instructor and academic advisor for graduate Bilingual, English as a New Language (ENL), and Special Education teachers at CUNY's City College of New York and Hunter College. Her research looks at the intersections of language learning and dis/ability. Specifically, she focuses on children who are multilingual and do not speak to communicate. She centers families' communication practices and systems to highlight what schools and school professionals can learn from children and families. Her work challenges the white supremacist norms that position dis/ability and language learning as deficit and inferior in United States schooling. She believes that liberatory learning involves young people and families as the experts and guides in the learning process. Lilly is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Raciolinguistic Justice in Early Childhood Teacher Education at Erikson Institute in Chicago.

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Approach to Inclusive Practices (Routledge, 2019), co-editor of *Practicing Disability Studies in Education: Acting toward Social Change* (Peter Lang, 2014), and author of *What Mothers Say about Special Education: From the 1960s to the Present* (Palgrave, 2009). Jan has authored numerous articles and book chapters that address inclusive schooling and the politics of difference. She is currently developing a model that integrates disability studies and applied theatre to raise disability awareness in public schools. She consults with integrated (disabled and nondisabled) theatre and dance companies and provides professional development on inclusive practices for various arts organizations.

Notes

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