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# **Contested spaces in graphic narrative: Exploring homeland through Miriam Libicki's *Jobnik!: An American Girl's Adventures in the Israeli Army***

## **Keywords**

Jewish diaspora  
return to homeland  
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border conflict  
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graphic narrative  
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## **Abstract**

*'Contested spaces in graphic narrative' argues that spatiality in graphic narratives is conducive to restructuring fraught landscapes. Through an exploration of the contested homelands of the Israeli Palestinian conflict in Miriam Libicki's Jobnik!: An American Girl's Adventures in the Israeli Army (2008), this article argues that graphic narratives have a unique ability to depict geographical spaces through lines, panels and various artistic devices. Like maps, such lines and boxes on a page physically create borders and represent corresponding location as bounded; they may represent existing political divisions, or they may*

*subvert and push state-drawn boundaries. These devices within the graphic form open up a recognition of the ways that boundaries obfuscate the multifaceted representations of identity that include multiple nationalisms, ideological discontinuities, as well as human-centred spatial connections. Graphic form, then, becomes a landscape that allows for a complex visual understanding of affective attachment to the state through possibilities of graphic, bordered texts that cut across traditional understandings of territoriality and occupation. Libicki's status as an outsider and as a woman in the Israel Defense Forces emphasizes her position of precarity in traditional conceptions of the Biblical Jewish homeland as well as in Israel, the modern Jewish state.*

'Next year in Jerusalem' is a familiar refrain in Jewish households particularly at the end of the Passover Seder, and it marks the exodus from Egypt and the commencement of the journey to the land of Israel. 'Next year' signals a feeling of displacement, a sense of being never at home, and with it a longing for permanence and stability. Jerusalem, of course, refers not only to a geographical place, but also to an imaginary vision of homeland, rootedness and redemption. What happens when the place that dwells in people's cultural imaginations becomes a real geographical location, when memory and desire become embodied in place? Jewish texts may be particularly useful in thinking about desire for homeland because of the long history of Jewish diaspora. Though many scholars have theorized the role of homeland in diaspora and migration,<sup>1</sup> few have explored the ways that Jewish pictorial narratives represent the intersections of the homeland of the imaginary<sup>2</sup> with the homeland of lived experience. How might graphic form enable new thinking about the relationship between imagined homeland and real homeland, in this case, the relationship between the Jerusalem of the heart and the geographical, political place? In what ways do pictorial representations of contested space challenge the ways that we think about conflicting narratives of memory, gender and national place?

Spatial configuration of border conflict refracted through graphic narrative may indeed open new ways of viewing narratives of conflict. First, literary narrative in graphic form is a particularly fascinating medium with which to explore the power dynamics of contested and colonized spaces. Because of its pictorial rendering of border discourse, spatial interpretations of contested spaces in graphic narratives have the potential to both mimic and subvert the very terms on which national boundaries are predicated. Such an analysis allows for an articulation of geography in an interpretive framework which is itself spatial. Further, the ways that physical representations of geographical location and space on a page are manipulated using various graphic devices may be instructive for refiguring bounded, static and unproblematic constructions of space.<sup>3</sup>

I explore the concept of contested space as always intersectional and multi-temporal, a conjuncture that highlights the connections between nationalism, gender and homeland. Like the identity of many other nation states, the identity of Israel is informed by boundaries, both literal and otherwise.

1. Scholars that have explored these questions include Robin Cohen, Benedict Anderson, Salman Rushdie, Avtar Brah, Nikos Papas-tergiadis, Jonathan Boyarin, Edward Said and William Safran, among others.
2. Homeland here refers to the historical idea of Israel as the homeland of the Jews, the cultural memory that links Israel to the Jewish people, individual memory that shapes patriotic loyalty and desire for homeland, as well as the sense of loss in the idealization of Israel as homeland.
3. Though geographers Doreen Massey, Patricia McDowell and YiFu Tuan, among others, have challenged this understanding of space, perceptions of Israel and Palestine are imbued with these older static notions of historical belonging and geographical origins. Questions such as who has been there the longest, to whom does the land really belong, and who has authority over which territory still shape political discussions of the land.

Exclusive notions of national belonging, religious notions of Biblical promise, and the cultural memory of victimization are all central to building a cohesive story of membership as a Jewish Israeli (Segev 1991; Zertal 2005). The repeated historical attempts to create untenable divisions of space, histories and peoples in geographical locations of Israel–Palestine are revealed here as attempts to both fix and separate out that which is always flexible, impermanent and inextricably intertwined.

Israeli American writer Miriam Libicki's graphic memoir, *Jobnik!: An American Girl's Adventures in the Israeli Army* (2008) is an attempt to synthesize her imaginary conceptions of Israel as homeland with her lived knowledge based on her experiences in the Israeli army during 2000–2001. Her army diary notes were first worked into the short story 'Rituk', and later were used as the basis for the larger work *Jobnik!* (Libicki 2010: 261). In her essay about Jewish memoir in graphic form, 'Jewish memoir goes Pow! Zap! Oy!', Libicki notes that the comics based on her life in Israel were not accepted at the local Jewish Community Center gallery because, she was told, her 'love for Israel is not evident' in them, and she would 'break the Holocaust survivors' hearts' (2010: 272). Indeed Libicki's graphic memoir works to complicate the often-binary rhetoric that surrounds the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

Miriam, an American, modern-Orthodox Jew, with powerful allegiances to Israel, volunteers in the Israeli army for a period of two years. Once in Israel, her experiences of unsettling violence – both militaristic and sexual – create an insightful dissonance between her identity as a patriotic Israeli and her increasing distress over the surrounding representations of aggression. While the character Miriam clearly supports the state of Israel, the nationalist narratives of the government and army are often ruptured by depictions of political events and by representations of her serial misogynistic relationships. These simultaneous spatial representations of memory create textual friction that reveals Miriam's difficulty reconciling state violence with her intersecting identities. Her position as a woman, a low-status 'jobnik' in the army, an American and a non-native Hebrew speaker put her in a position of relative powerlessness in a system that values physical strength, maleness, military status and native language ability. While she does indeed position herself as a member of a nation state – of both the United States and Israel – the complex graphic renderings of her ambivalence towards Israeli power in spatial terms create a second story of identity – one that suggests a connection between her own gendered identity position in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the larger systems of violence and territorial divisions.

### **Intersecting borders in *Jobnik!***

In a graphic image that becomes telling for the rest of the memoir, the back and front covers of Miriam Libicki's graphic narrative *Jobnik!* open up to create a two-page, full-colour illustration of an exclusively militarized Israeli space within which Miriam grasps her unbuttoned and untucked Israeli

army uniform shirt as she walks away from the male barracks, stars and jets careening overhead in a carnivalesque light show (Figure 1). The white stars and jets that hover above Miriam's head invoke militaristic and Biblical narratives that have both informed the Israeli Palestinian conflict. While the stars suggest the Biblical promise to multiply Abraham's descendants like stars in the sky and to bequeath them 'these lands' (Genesis 26:4), the jets are an unsettling contemporary representation of Israeli militaristic power in a kaleidoscopic backdrop. Above Miriam, jets careen in Ferris wheel-like formation, suggesting a subversion of the depiction of military power. The graphic depictions of the narratives of Biblical territorial promise and military actions mingle together in a single panel to illustrate the complex and often-competing narratives that create bounded spaces. Symbols commonly associated with the stories of a Jewish Promised Land fill the space in the panel as Miriam looks on in surprise while she buttons her uniform. Miriam moves between gendered locations – the male and female barracks – in her army base (a precarious zone to be sure, as suggested by her unbuttoned uniform), while the complex intermingling of historical and political narratives are represented literally above her head. This image functions on several levels, making manifest the intersections of nationalist, historical, political, religious and gendered narratives, and their repercussions on Miriam's personal life.<sup>4</sup>

Diaspora and border theory are contingent upon conceptions of home and homeland, both practical and imaginary. Yet home is not such a simple place to conceptualize. Homes may be domestic spaces, physical locations, or even groups of people; however, home does imply a sense of belonging and safety. What happens, then, when the home becomes a site of violence or violation? If, as Susan Friedman claims, 'longing for home is the body's desire – a feeling of homesickness experienced viscerally in the flesh' (2004: 191), then Miriam's experiences rupture the narrative of bodily longing and allow her to see beyond the narrative of Israel as militarized homeland to the suppressed narratives beneath.

As she experiences physical violation of her own body and of the body of the country she identifies with as homeland, she grows to question the narratives of obligatory service to that homeland and the exclusionary and violent border politics that define it. She, in some sense, has become an outsider in her own narrative – a subject of violation and dislocation. Likewise, her own narrative cannot exist without the incursions of the Second Intifada's violence. That is, the terms of victimhood and power on which the state's existence is predicated allow for the validation of the militarism in which she participates; instead of a sense of home and belonging, Miriam finds a more complex narrative in which she is implicated as both perpetrator (as army soldier, keeper of borders) and victim of the homeland for which she longs.

Miriam's multiple subject positions are laid out on the first page of the prologue as a layered collage of Miriam's identity in September 2000. These are portrayed retrospectively. It begins, 'It's been over a year since I've written in this. I am still Miriam Libicki' (2008: 4). The text copy tells us

4. 'The space of the human being is the most critical site to watch the production and reproduction of power', suggests Edward Soja in *Third Space* ([1996] 114). Soja thus reminds us of the intimate relationship between the body and imagined homeland.

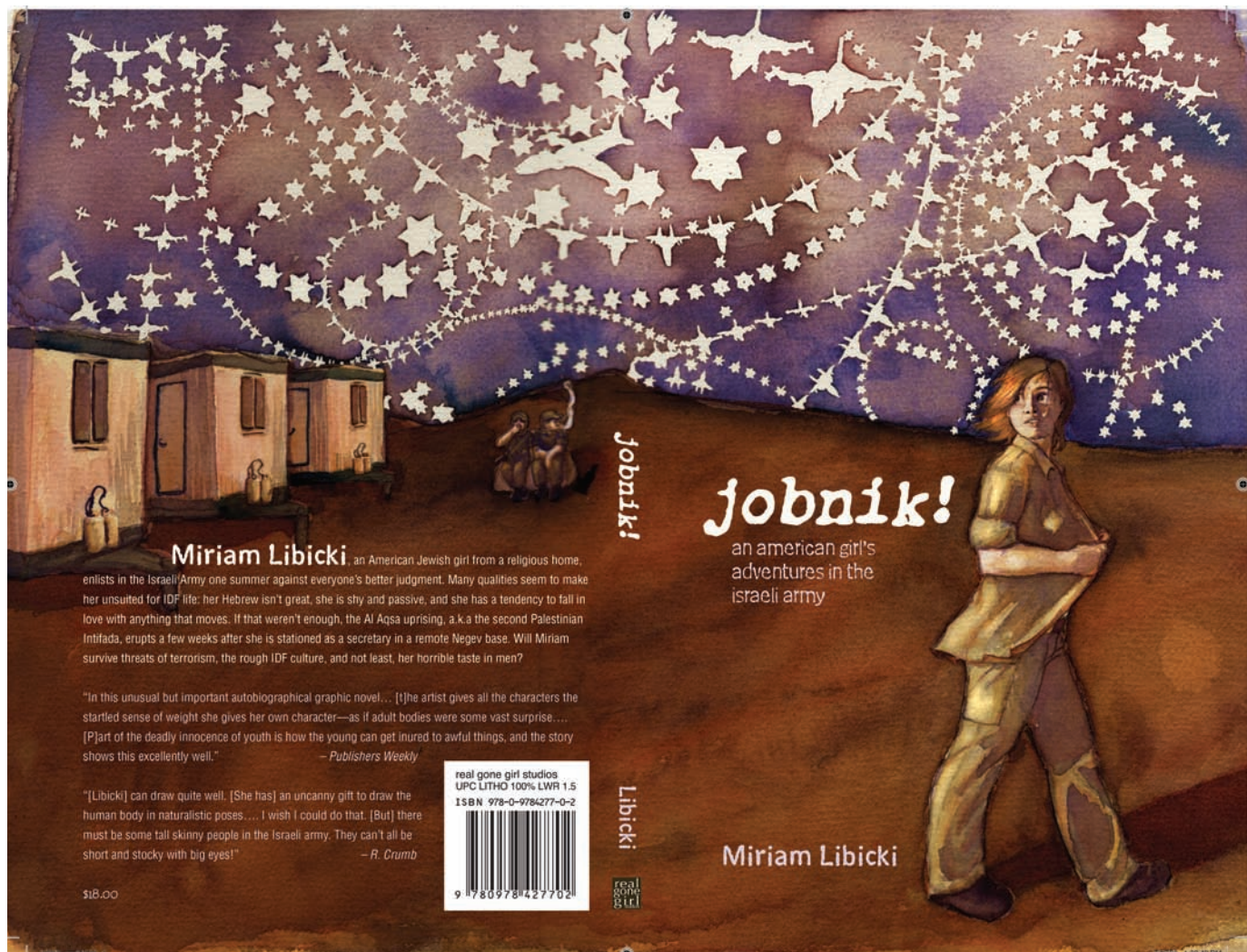


Figure 1: Back and front covers of *Jobnik!*.

that she is a citizen of the United States and Israel, an Israeli soldier and a sexually active young woman (2008: 4). Five black and white sketches of Polaroid photos depicting Miriam's sexual encounters are set over a drawing of Miriam sitting in her army bunk writing in her diary (2008: 4). These Polaroid-like illustrations of past sexual experiences quite literally cover over the image of Miriam in the present tense narrative (Figure 2). These overlays create a collage-effect that foregrounds her sexuality as intertwined with her identity as a soldier, particularly her low status as a *pkida*, or low-level administrative assistant. Throughout the text graphic depictions of unsatisfying intimate relationships along with one instance of anal rape act as ruptures in the narrative of Israeli nationalism at the diatetic level of the plot.

The narrative layering techniques in this first introduction to Miriam's personal and nationalist identity is telling for the rest of the text, not only because it represents her intimate encounters within the context of the Israeli military, but because it demonstrates a portrayal of identity connected to specific historical moments of collective cultural memory. By using techniques of narrative layering and temporal juxtaposition to create renderings of historical memory concurrently with the present tense narrative or by collapsing and expanding representations of time, graphic narratives have the potential to recast and complicate limiting notions of Jewish identity. Overlapping images of events and places, for example, create dynamic spaces that elude the static boundaries of colonized places and expose the multiple narratives that reside below the surface of the constructed place; it allows us to see multifaceted stories of identity and place, those narratives that may otherwise remain invisible.

Comics' self-conscious representation of itself as a narrative form 'renders textualization conspicuous' (Chute 2008: 457) and is self-disclosing as a subjective depiction of experience and history. Such representations are not attempts to recreate the trauma or event as such, but to self-consciously recontextualize memory – both individual and collective – as an integral part of national identity making. Indeed self-conscious representations break the common dialectical position of either/or membership in a community that inevitably positions Others as outside of one's own rhetorical position. Historical memories, then, are rendered as active cultural narratives that affect present tense narratives of militarism, nationalism, and Miriam's own feelings of patriotism.

Historical narratives in graphic form allow us to perceive history and time in spatial terms. If comics or graphic narrative uses a hybrid form that represents the verbal and the visual in two separate narrative tracks (Chute 2008: 452), then spatial layering creates multiple simultaneous narrative tracks. Layering techniques effectively register temporality in spatial terms, not only conveying slowed down or speeded up time, but allowing for different times and events to be presented at once. Memories can coexist spatially alongside or in between present tense narratives, recasting the past as an inextricable component of the present moment. Within such graphic mediums, we may see history and the present simultaneously or scan back and forth between non-synchronous events,



Figure 2: Layered collage of Miriam's identity in the prologue.

making meaning as we do so. 'Reading' in this sense requires us to (re)order and (re)create the narrative while interpreting multiple modes of representation. When we encounter vertical or overlapping panels, for example, the linear progression of the narrative becomes ambiguous; we experience events in spatial depth and volume unavailable in a strictly language text.<sup>5</sup> Particularly in representations of traumatic or politically contentious histories, such visual techniques challenge traditional historical narratives, allowing for more permeable and creative thinking about history and conflict by refiguring representations of the past. Libicki depends upon such techniques in order to register her retrospective explorations of Jewish national patriotism, Israeli military power, and the personal repercussions of nationalistic identity.

## Spatial occupation

Understanding the ways that images inhabit the blank space on a page may be useful for thinking about fraught geographical spaces. In graphic narratives, the terrain of the page becomes occupied space; panels and images recreate the space into defined and limited places. Lines and gutters (the space between panels) divide a page into separate spheres and locations. A panel is itself an additional representation of a confined space, a condensed representation of a limited environment. Such lines and boxes on a page physically create borders and represent corresponding location as bounded. The images themselves represent artistic choices that privilege certain landscape and narratives over others. We might ask, for example, what representations are absent on any given page. In Libicki's text, her panels represent Jewish Israelis and Israeli space almost exclusively, and Palestinians are only given panel space in news footage. The occupation of space in the text and the clearly separate narrative spheres between Israelis and Palestinians<sup>6</sup> is an indicator of the larger narrative and spatial boundaries of the nation state. The patterns, sizes, repetitions and absences of images and panels reveal the invisible dynamics that are always present in the politics of space.

Spatial patterns not only mimic, but also have the potential to subvert the power relations that they describe. For example, multiple locations may intersect or overlap on a page to illustrate the collapse of geographical boundaries. The panels that show Miriam's identity formation in particular often employ techniques of overlapping historical and cultural narratives along with her personal experiences. In addition to spatial proximity, graphic narratives use other artistic devices such as shading, size of panel and characters, landscape detail, and rogue images that cross panel borders (such as the stone thrower in Figure 4) to signal the breakage in seemingly clean, linear narratives of nationhood (Figure 4).

Like literary maps, the boundaries and routes of graphic panels bring 'to light the internal logic of narrative, the semiotic domain around which plot coalescences and self-organizes' (Moretti 1998: 5). Literary maps allow us to see the place-bound nature of literary forms. Instead of the single plane that

5. In *The System of Comics* ([1999] 2007), French scholar Thierry Groensteen articulates the semiotics of comics, exploring for example the spatio-topical system of comics, or the specific placement of panels on a page and the aesthetic affects generated by the panel, the frame, the gutter and so on.
6. The labels 'Israeli' and 'Palestinian' are of course a simplification of the more complex layers and religious identifications in Israel-Palestine. Israeli citizens can be Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Druze. Palestinians may be those who identify as the people/families that were present in Palestine before Israeli statehood or those who refuse to identify with the Israeli state. Religious and cultural identities of Palestinians might include Muslim, Bedouin, Druze and Christian.

prose occupies (left-to-right in English), graphic form's two-dimensional plane allows us to see the ways that we create divisions of cultures, religions and power relations in spatial terms. Prose metaphor is the means by which language expresses and contains space; however, prose occupies only one spatial plane and has little possibility of spatial manipulation. Images in graphic narratives work to represent the event or social construction in terms that allow for spatial articulation. The devices used in graphic art might include diagonal slicing, panel overlay, or slowed moment-to-moment panels. Thus objects or objects-as-metaphors are locations in physical space that interact and speak to other images in that narrative space. Within comics, the panel becomes the map that creates story. We see the imaginary in pictorial terms (metaphorical and spatial), which allows the reader to take into consideration, among other things, the strong, but often invisible influence of contested historical memory; in the case of *Jobnik!*, Biblical narratives and the fear of displacement and homelessness permeate the nationalist spaces.

For example, the graphic interactions of the current events (in the year 2000) in dialogue with historical memory lay bare the constructs of Miriam's outward patriotism, a central component of her identity in *Jobnik!*. While Miriam is participating in an army memorial service for Yitzhak Rabin in 2000, she remembers hearing about his murder while still a student in the United States in 1995. Her memories are visually inserted into the present tense narrative (2008: 73). Her pride at being a member of the IDF at this moment is evident as these historical moments collide in the visual medium.

The largest drawing on the page depicts Miriam as an almost indistinguishable part of her unit standing silently as another woman soldier sings, 'Ein Li Eretz Acheret', a popular song by the well-known nationalist singer Naomi Shemer. The refrain translates, 'I have no other country/ even if my land is aflame/ just a word in Hebrew/ pierces my veins and my soul' (2008: 72). This image of Miriam's army unit observing Rabin's *yarzeit* or death anniversary are juxtaposed with her memories of Rabin's death in 1995, and with representations of an aerial map showing Israel from further and further away in four sliver-like diagonally positioned frames. In the final sliver frame, we are left with a picture of the globe in which Israel is indistinguishable. When read from top to bottom, these drawings work to show the minute size of a seemingly vulnerable Israel in a larger world and universe (Figure 3). But when read left to right on the diagonal, the construction of Miriam's patriotism, that is her actions as a Jew who chooses to make *aliyah* or immigrate to Israel and to join the military become more transparent. The side-by-side frames of a diminishing Israel and Miriam's immigration to Israel in 1998 together with her reflection on her mother's grief at Rabin's death in 1995 show a desire to protect a country positioned as vulnerable – literally in danger of disappearing in the larger world. At the same time, it depicts her own desire to live in and take responsibility for the survival of, what she positions as, the only 'real' Jewish homeland. The narrative slicing illustrates her fierce loyalty in the face of her fear of Israel's disappearance in the wake of the Prime



Figure 3: Temporal slicing illustrates an aerial view of Israel on the left along with Miriam's memories of making aliyah/immigrating to Israel on the right.

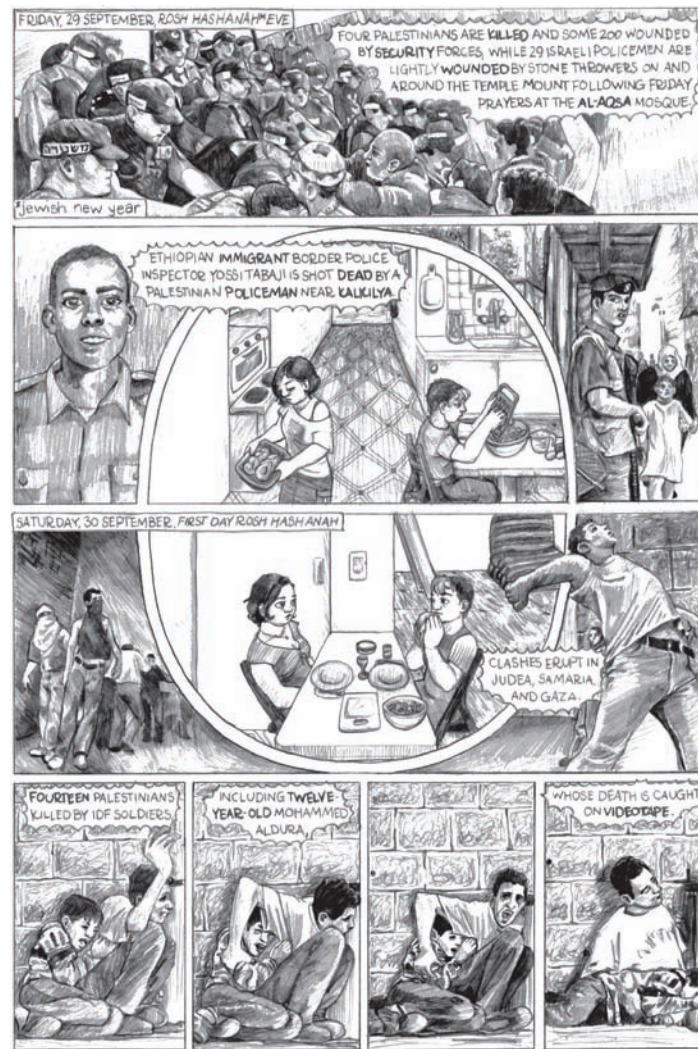


Figure 4: Arm crosses over panel into Miriam's world (top 3/4 of panel) and temporal slowing in Aldura panels.

7. My use of the term 'home' refers to an imaginary conception of a place of origin that is part of both individual and communal identity making. The result of the strong rhetorical position that Israel occupies as home within the Jewish psyche makes taking a position of 'ethical deterritorialization' extremely difficult (Bernard-Donals 2010).

Minister's murder; the murder, however, is committed by the young Jewish Israeli settler Yigal Amir, a Jew who is circumscribed within the space of Israeli citizenship. This series of memories and the cinematic-like aerial shots of Israel lead her to conclude, 'I don't belong in Israel as much as I belong to Israel. Every year on Rabin's *yahrzeit* I know it's not even a choice' (2008: 73). Her nationalism here is constructed as an obligation she must incur, not as a choice. If nations are often figured as domestic genealogies, as Anne McClintock argues (1995: 357), then Miriam's struggle is figured as a result of her desire to be part of a family constituted by nationalism.

Slowed down time and interjections of memory in the form of temporal slicing are graphic devices that help articulate Miriam's sense of obligation to the idea of homeland as familial obligation in times of national mourning and internal strife. The spatial representations expand a moment in time to emphasize the complexity of Miriam's constructions of patriotism as identity. Clearly within her present tense narrative her memories of Rabin's death become germinal in her decision to move to Israel, and her service in the army becomes a way to actively exercise her patriotism. Thus, her memories have become a part of her narrative about her sense of belonging 'to Israel' and, I argue, about her cognizance of her subsequent difficulties engaging with the various forms of violence that increasingly invade her narrative. The surrounding text, which tells of Miriam's personal experiences of subordination and abuse in the context of the army, reveal to the reader that Miriam's patriotism is not an unquestioning allegiance but an identity position that is thrown into question as the political narrative progresses.

Her geopolitical location within Israeli society, in effect, allows her to recognize her own vulnerability within a patriarchal militaristic institution and thus to occupy a subject position that permits her to see the vulnerability of the Palestinians as targets of this same institution. While she does indeed position herself as a member of a nation state, the complex graphic renderings of her ambivalence towards Israeli power create a second story of membership that produce a different rhetorical position: Miriam's graphic narrative disengages from the narrative of the Second Intifada, while Libicki's retrospective narrative – that is the reflections on Miriam's position – troubles the often unquestioned Jewish national allegiance to Israel as home.<sup>7</sup> Her geopolitical location within Israeli society, in effect, allows her to recognize her own vulnerability within a highly militarized patriarchal institution, and thus to occupy a subject position that permits her to see the vulnerability of those positioned in similar precarious narratives of both homeland and nationhood.

### **Domestic home and national violence**

Creative depictions of violence in the form of reproduced media images and their relationship to Miriam's body on the space of the page generate an additional narrative that shows Miriam's struggles with – and her disassociation from – the Second Intifada. These interruptions are heightened in

the chronological plot of Miriam's army service beginning on 28 September 2000 when Ariel Sharon announces his visit to the Palestinian-controlled Temple Mount (2008: 36). Sharon's tour of this religiously and politically fraught area became the central tipping point for the beginning of the Second Intifada. Graphic panels of Sharon in sunglasses, masked Palestinian protesters throwing rocks, and Israeli police in riot gear surround images of the silent Miriam as she rides the bus to her apartment in Jerusalem for Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year (Figure 4). Libicki draws this page of panels in collage form (rather than with traditional square or rectangular panels in rows), tying together seemingly disparate events as intimately connected. Miriam's inner circle of home though doubtlessly separated from the panels depicting the intifada (this shown in double-lined panel divisions) is situated within the larger context of political space. Despite the close spatial arrangement of these images, Miriam is repeatedly represented as detached from these events by the gutters and spaces between panels. Miriam silently goes about her daily life, cooking, eating a Rosh Hashanah meal with her sister (2008: 37), or riding the bus. The only visible reaction to these events is a short sentence written below the panel which reads, 'Then everything goes wrong' (2008: 36); the graphic techniques become the vehicle for both Miriam's voice and Libicki's retrospective insights. In this set of panels, Libicki creates broad, white arc-shaped divisions between the images of Miriam and those of the violence. This literally removes Miriam from the realities of the intifada; indeed, her life seems to continue on quite normally despite the dramatic political downturn. The close proximity of the panels of violence to Miriam's more mundane life, however, reveals a different story. By putting the images of violence and the frenetic pace of the news copy in juxtaposition to Miriam's silence in the surrounding frames, Libicki suggests that Miriam, though seemingly numb to these events, is unable to escape the escalating violence, the military actions of the intifada or her silent complicity with them.

In one scene, for example, the arm of a Palestinian man throwing stones wanders into the next frame of Miriam silently preparing for Erev Rosh Hashanah, the first evening of the Jewish New Year (2008: 37). This rogue image, or picture that cross over the gutter spaces that separate out temporally and spatially divided events, creates an unexpected rupture of the panel borders and, hence, the borders of Miriam's personal experience. By using graphic devices of overlay and gutter separation (lines or spaces that create physical separations between panels), Libicki depicts Miriam's emotional distance from the violence of the intifada; however, when an arm crosses over the space that divides panels and enters Miriam's silent world, the political climate becomes an undeniable part of her own experiences and her shifting political awareness (Figure 4). Though Miriam sits at the table eating a festival meal with her sister, her surrounding world blows up in violence, shaking the safety of her own domestic space. The panel borders between the events that start the Second Intifada and Miriam's serene kitchen are penetrated – showing not only a growing awareness on Miriam's part, but a recognition of the interdependence of these two narratives: her own commitment to Israel (or, as she articulates earlier, 'belonging to' Israel) and the explosion of violence in the surrounding landscape.

A five-panel sequence showing the death of 12-year-old Mohammed al Dura in Gaza on 30 September 2000 becomes a continuation of this visual incursion of the intifada into Miriam's personal life (Figure 4, bottom panels). A moment-by-moment rendering of the IDF shooting of al Dura – taken from France-2 video footage that was aired on the Israeli news – spatially lengthens the action, prolonging the representations of al Dura's suffering. The series of four images at the bottom of the page shows the Palestinian father Jamal pinned against a wall with his young son. While the IDF initially accepted responsibility for the death of al Dura, it later retracted responsibility saying that the event had been staged. The French courts claimed in May of 2008 that the killing was orchestrated ('Court Backs Claim' *Haaretz*), while Hamas leaders claim that al Dura was indeed killed by IDF gunfire (Anon. 2013). The ambiguous truth status of this incident and the surrounding controversy represents the complex and long-waging disagreements that shape the Israeli and Palestinian conflict. The validity of the actions of the IDF becomes suspect in Miriam's narrative in this temporally slowed rendering of violence against civilians. The proximity of these panels create a narrative where the al-Aqsa riot leads to stone throwing and finally to the death of a father and child. The visual detachment of Miriam's domestic activities from these political scenes suggests that Miriam has difficulty reconciling these events with her own investment in her daily life and feelings of home. Jamal's arm is shown stretched back in an act of defiance against the throngs of police depicted in the panels above him. The arm enters Miriam's dining room as her sister says *HaMotzi*, the ritual blessing over the bread: blessed are you our God, King of the Universe who brings forth bread from the earth. The juxtaposition of the quiet moment of prayer and the act of resistance embodied in the arm creates a tension that illuminates the ways that Miriam is implicated in the politics, if not the physical violence of the conflict. Despite her best attempts to ignore the political violence and injustice that increasingly invade the spaces of her visual narrative, the violence becomes inextricably connected to her experiences, her sense of self, her identity and her budding sexuality.

### Gendered violence

The narrative of Miriam's sexual experimentation in *Jobnik!* rivals the thematic importance of the political violence in the text; indeed, it becomes an inextricable part of her army narrative. The pictorial representations in the text make visible Miriam's complex geopolitical identity as a non-native Israeli, a desk worker, and a woman in this militarized and patriarchal space. The first-person narrative voice that is present in the prologue is conspicuously absent throughout most of the memoir. Dates, news copy, and dialogue between other soldiers are common enough; however, Miriam's written thoughts are scarce. Libicki instead used the dissonance between the graphic images and the text copy to convey her retrospective narrative voice. Her verbal silence in the present simultaneously shows complicity with the patriarchal narratives of nationalism that she encounters and reveals

the divisiveness of these narratives for those in subordinate positions in this system. The prevalence of Miriam's multiple unfulfilling sexual encounters with male soldiers illustrates how the narrative of militaristic violence that Miriam attempts to shut out becomes an internalized experience in her intimate relationships. The site of Miriam's body may be read as an extension of the national violence that is visible throughout the rest of the graphic text and, like the violence of the intifada, remains largely uncommented upon except in pictorial terms.

Miriam's geopolitical location in a militarized culture determines much of her experience in the army. Interestingly, being an American-born citizen (an identity that in other contexts is so often equated with power and strength) in this context positions her as an outsider. Though Jewish, she is a non-native Israeli and immigrant and, therefore, perceived as a relative outsider in the close-knit hierarchy of the Israeli army. Because her language skills are poor (she tells us), she is useless even for important office work, a job many women are given. As Susan Sered writes, most women in the Israeli army are groomed as menial workers; rare is the woman combat soldier. In a telling comment, Colonel Gershon HaCohen announced to a group of future army conscripts in Israel that, 'Traditionally men are warriors and women are prostitutes, and that most of what women do in the IDF can be replaced with office machines' (Sered 2000: 80–81). Miriam's status as a woman in an institution that values male-centred combat puts her at a disadvantage. Even the psychological profile that she is given by a male officer, who gives her a cursory *précis* using Rorschach ink blots, diagnoses her as 'overly emotional, disconnected from reality, possessed of anxieties (especially social), unable to form interpersonal bonds, sexually conflicted ...' (2008: 4). The overlapping cards of inkblots are a disturbing mirror image of the Polaroids of Miriam in sexual positions in the prologue. When read together, the army's inkblots represent an institutional erasure of any personal identity that Miriam establishes on the earlier page. She is diagnosed and defined by the huge black and white images that hover above a miniaturized Miriam who hunches over her sketch book in the corner of the panel (2008: 5). The army psychiatrist's diagnosis includes 'ambiguous sexuality' (something Miriam herself does not discuss in this novel), which lowers Miriam's profile yet again. As Alon Raab points out in 'Ben Gurion's Golem and Jewish Lesbians', for many years anyone suspected of having homosexual tendencies in the Israeli army was viewed as unreliable, and thus not allowed to serve in intelligence units, for example (2010: 228). Miriam's geopolitical locations are determined by heteronormative patriarchal values within the militaristic mechanisms of the Israeli army.

Throughout *Jobnik!* the nationalist narratives of Miriam's experiences in the army are continually paralleled by her serial misogynistic relationships. These narrative interruptions create a textual dissonance that reveals Miriam's inability to reconcile state violence with her intersecting identities; her vision of Israel as homeland has been ruptured. Miriam's position of powerlessness within a system that values physical strength, maleness, military status, and native language ability becomes clearer in the brief sexual encounters that Miriam repeatedly hopes will develop into relationships.

8. For the concept of double-consciousness see W. E. B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk* ([1903] 2003: 3).

By using news copy to push Miriam towards Asher's bedroom, militaristic violence is translated to bodily violence in Libicki's text. Just after Yom Kippur 2000, an escalation in violence is reflected in the barrage of news copy. In this scene, Miriam reads *Maariv*, an Israeli newspaper, as news text swarms around her body. The news copy telling of political demonstrations, tank incursions into the West Bank, and both Palestinian and Israeli casualties take up sixteen frames, crowding Miriam's physical space (2008: 63). Her immediate reaction to the horrors she reads is to find Asher (presumably for comfort), one of the soldiers with whom she has repeated sexual encounters. After a brief rendezvous with Asher, she leaves his bunk clutching her sketchbook. Her sketches are her primary means of self-expression and the medium through which she is able to render an interpretation of these experiences in graphic form – perhaps the very one we read in *Jobnik!*. As she leaves the male barracks, she looks up again at the night sky, loses her balance and falls onto the ground. She lies there silently staring upwards with wide eyes. Three slanted frames give the reader a sense of Miriam's vertigo (2008: 65). The juxtaposition of the graphic devices in these scenes links violence in the news media, Miriam's sexual encounters, and her vertigo. The narrative in visual form shows that Miriam is haunted by state violence in the form of media reports of Palestinian deaths, as she simultaneously works to serve the mechanism of militarization. Indeed, she takes part in the dominant heteronormative narrative of the Israeli army, servicing soldiers at the expense of her own psyche as her body gives way beneath her. The patriotism that leads her to move to Israel and support the military becomes irreconcilable with the violence and injustice she continues to see around her.

Miriam's complex experience of homeland and identity may be framed as an experience of double vision. In his discussion of Caribbean diasporic identity, Stuart Hall claims that peoples who have been forced into diaspora experience both continuity with the past that allows them to create a cohesive 'oneness' from their experiences and profound discontinuity in the wake of diaspora (1997: 235). This doubleness of identity<sup>8</sup> may be useful in thinking about Jewish identity as steeped in the desire for homeland both in the wake of the diaspora and the genocide of European Jews during the Holocaust. Miriam's experience of dissonance can be framed in terms that parallel Hall's. She goes into the army in order to experience the continuity of the past and to bring this imaginary 'oneness' into being. What she experiences is incongruous with her expectations of unity. As an immigrant, albeit an immigrant to her perceived homeland, she finds herself positioned as an outsider in the closed, patriarchal world of the Israeli military. Historically, Jewishness has been positioned in transgressive terms in the Diaspora. The establishment of the State of Israel then, repositions Jews both inside and outside of Israel in a bind of double identity – both as victims of oppression and exile, but also as oppressors. This Jewish doubleness resonates with Miriam's experiences as a religious American Jew in the Israeli army, for rather than a place of safety and stability for women, home (a smaller, domesticated version of homeland) is 'a place constructed by power and inequality' (McDowell 2003: 15). Miriam's experience of homeland then is not the 'home' she has imagined;

her disruption of the cohesive narrative of nation here is significant. If a nation is an 'imagined community because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation ... the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 1983: 7), then Miriam's experiences create a significant rupture in the allegedly unified narrative of nationhood.

9. Sharon Rotbard details the *Homa Umigdal* project in his essay, 'Wall and tower' (2003).

### Respatializing the memory of the Holocaust

During Miriam's extended initiation into Israeli army life, the multiple systems of cultural violence become more apparent. Libicki's explorations of Jewish Israeli cultural memory of the Holocaust work to undermine Miriam's initial conceptions of Israeli power. The memoir represents Miriam as inducted into Israeli army life through an act that associates her metaphorically with the ovens of the death camps in 1940s Europe. The very first task she is given in the army is to burn classified materials in an incinerator. The soldier who gathers the paper materials intended for burning in a large postal bag turns to her and asks, 'remember the Nazis? [re]member where the dead Jews went?' (2008: 14). A rigid Miriam stares out at the reader from an all white background in the following frame. Her silence and shocked expression show her horror at this Israeli soldier's casual reference to the death camps. Even more disturbing is her potential association with the Nazis in this soldier's black humour. The graphic panels on the following pages invoke the landscape of the death camps superimposed onto the Israeli landscape through a use of signifiers associated with the Holocaust.

Collective Jewish memories of the death camps in the form of recognizable symbols create new hybrid landscapes where past stories are rendered as active cultural narratives. Close-up views of a Star of David on the side of the military vehicle, a guard tower in the distance, stripes from the corrugated metal shelter, and smoke and flames billowing out of the incinerator (2008: 20) create a double rendering of history; these symbols easily invoke both the spaces of the Israeli military and Holocaust Europe. The double metonyms on this page create a spatial environment that is multi-temporal, multi-directional rendering of history. The Star of David, for example, invokes the traditional symbol of the Jewish people, but also suggests the Magen David Adom of the Israeli ambulance service and the yellow star that was mandated for Jews living under the Nazi regime during World War II. Similarly, the guard tower or military observation tower of the IDF stands in for an ideology of the Israeli state, *Homa Umigdal*: the quick-build wall and tower structures that were erected for purposes of land reclamation and security in the pre-state landscape.<sup>9</sup> Simultaneously, the visual association of the tower with the gaping incinerator in these panels transforms the tower into a Nazi guard tower, similar to those surrounding camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau. So too the stripes of the corrugated metal outbuilding easily shift to invoke the infamous stripes of the prisoner's uniforms in Auschwitz. These symbols haunt the space on the page around Miriam's body and as such affect

10. The importance of making women visible in this process of nationalization and militarization is imperative because Jewish women have been not only members, but also objects, of the nationalist imagination. They have lived in some sense both inside and outside of the boundaries and borders of homelands – literal and imaginary.

Miriam's feelings of patriotism in *Jobnikl*, as well as the present tense narratives of nationalist identity, Israeli militarism and historical violence.

In a full-page sketch that collapses historical time, an ash-covered Miriam is depicted tending the oven from different angles, and then walking back to the headquarters alone under the shadows of the guard tower in the unbearable heat of the Israeli sun (Figure 5). Miriam is left to complete the burn and empty the ashes from the incinerator herself. The graphic renderings on the page are wordless (2008: 22–23), allowing the reader to focus attention on the complex images. When she returns to the office from the ovens covered in sweat and ash, she is greeted by one soldier with 'god, you smell bad', as her supervisor shouts from the other room, 'I give you permission not to do anything else before you go back to the barracks and *have a shower*' (2008: 24, original emphasis). This event physically dirties Miriam and makes her repulsive to her fellow soldiers. It is difficult not to read this scene as associated with the showers of Zyklon B used in the Nazi death camps in the 1940s. Through the act of burning papers, Miriam is situated within a larger system of power that resonates with historical atrocities wreaked upon the Jews, while the references to the showers visually connect her to the victims of historical atrocity. The surrealist rendering of the Israeli landscape together with a macabre European landscape blurs the lines of a fixed geographical position, creating an in-between space that makes manifest the tension between historical memories of trauma and Miriam's experiences of the state of Israel as homeland.<sup>10</sup> In this representation of an inverted power relationship, Libicki implicates both the patriarchal militarized system that has facilitated Miriam's position of powerlessness in the hierarchy of the IDF and Israeli's suspect moral position as military power.

The larger surrounding text which tells of Miriam's personal experiences of subordination and abuse in the context of the army reveal to the reader that Miriam's patriotism is not an unquestioning allegiance but an identity position that is thrown into question as the political narrative progresses. Her geopolitical location as a queer woman, an immigrant, and a non-native speaker within Israeli society, in effect, allows her to recognize her own vulnerability within a patriarchal militaristic institution and, thus, to occupy a subject position that permits her to see the vulnerability of others who fall outside the circumscribed parameters of institutionalized expectations.

As she experiences physical violation of her own body and of the body of the country she 'belongs to', she grows to question the narratives of obligatory military service to that homeland and the very terms that define it. Miriam, in some sense, has become a subject of violation and dislocation in her own narrative. In these graphic renderings, her personal narrative is inextricably connected with the representation of the incursion of the Second Intifada's violence and with stories of historical Jewish trauma. Instead of a sense of home and belonging, Miriam finds a more complex narrative in which she is implicated as both army soldier/keeper of borders and victim of the homeland for which she longs.

11. The Holocaust holds a central place in the formation of Israeli state. Also, it marks a point of anxiety in Jewish American connections to Israel. Birthright tours and pleas from Israel for funding regularly include references to the atrocities of World War II and the vulnerable position of the Jews in the world.

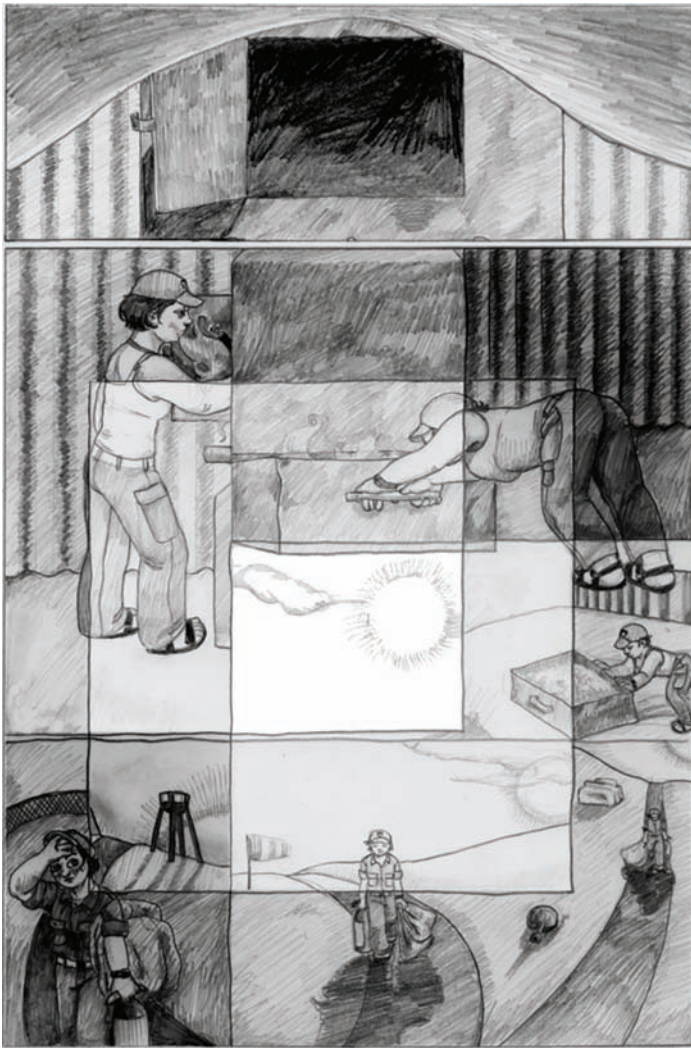


Figure 5: Cubist-like rendering of Miriam burning classified material and walking back to base under the shadow of the guard tower.<sup>11</sup>

My aims for spatializing the complex geopolitics in Libicki's graphic narrative are three-fold. First, I illustrate the ways that the graphic narrative has a particular role in depicting contested national locations, that is, ways that the creative organizations of space are able to complicate binary nationalist discourse and illustrate the precarious borders between the private and public. Second, I aim to foreground the role of gendered discourse in discussions and theories of diaspora and border theory in Jewish American literature. Because Jewish history has become a central paradigm for diaspora studies, it is imperative to make visible the ways that Jewish women have been members, but also objects, of the nationalist imagination. Third, I suggest that, metaphorically, 'Next year in Jerusalem' refers to a return to a more complex, inclusive notion of home stemming from the literary visions of spatial intersectionality described above. In this light, the current dialectical positions of Israel and Palestine become absurd in their rhetorical constructions; the multi-locationality of a transnational feminist lens allows us to see the connections and similarities between peoples living on a common geographical landscape, indeed, sites of historical, cultural and religious intersections that have existed all along. My hope is that such form can give rise to a new vision of space that refigures the formulaic conceptions of contested spaces in Israel and Palestine, while at the same time it can challenge our own thinking about rhetorically entrenched identity positions, cultural notions of homeland, and dangerous conflict.

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# International Journal of Education Through Art

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