

○ VOLUME 10 NUMBER 2, 2011

Digital Archives of Feelings and their Haunted Futures

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This article addresses the ways in which digitalised accounts of warfare and violence can shape emotional responses to death and suffering, as well as particular possibilities of remembering, forgetting and future accountability. Empirically, the article focuses on the photoblog of a Russian web journalist Rustem Adagamov, whose coverage of the events in Gaza attracted hundreds of comments from readers. Looking at Adagamov's blog from the distance of the past two years—the years of Goldstone report and the controversies surrounding it; of Israel's deadly storming of the 'Freedom Flotilla'; of the ongoing blockade and military attacks in Gaza and of other warfare in the region—this article attempts to imagine how narratives and public perceptions of war and death, captured by digital archives, would appear to future historians or archaeologists. My discussion is less concerned with speculations about their hypothetical reactions; what I am suggesting instead is that we should try to adopt an imaginary standpoint of a future archaeologist, or rather, of a future advocate of those from whom humanness and the right to life were denied both physically and discursively. I argue that adopting such a viewpoint as both a conceptual and an ethical anchor, we can take haunted futurity as a base for today's transformation to justice and conviviality.

Introduction

This article addresses the ways in which digitalised accounts of warfare and violence can shape emotional responses to death and suffering, as well as particular possibilities of remembering, forgetting and future accountability. The article started with my interest in the relations between digital 'structures of feelings' (Williams 1977)—the ways apathy, compassion, hatred or suspicion are shaped by on-line interactions, digital data and information flows—and broader political and affective regimes, such as those of grievability (Butler 2004, 2009), exception (Agamben 2005; Agathangelou 2010; Biswas & Nair

2010) and killability (Agathangalou et al. 2008). I began exploring these relations at the time of the Israeli military operation in Gaza in 2008-2009. As part of my broader project on transnationalism and affect in the Russian-language digital media, I was conducting fieldwork in the Russian segment of LiveJournal, www.livejournal.com. The choice of this blogging platform had little to do with the issues I address in this article—to some extent, I could have explored similar questions in another media platform or another demographic group. I simply ‘happened’ to be conducting on-line fieldwork in LiveJournal, when the events of 2008-2009 took place. The Israeli military operation galvanised the transnational blogosphere of the Russian LiveJournal. This is a multifaceted social space, connected by the use of one language (and to some extent, by the shared Soviet past), yet divided across racial, ethnic and religious lines, split between distinct geographic locations and multiple national attachments.¹ It was then that my attention was drawn to the photoblog of Rustem Adagamov, a Russian web journalist who divides his time between Russia and Norway and who runs his ‘illustrated blog about everything’ in LiveJournal (<http://drugoi.livejournal.com>).² The events in Gaza received an extensive coverage in his blog and attracted hundreds of comments from others.³

With an audience consisting of thousands of subscribers,⁴ Adagamov is one of the most popular and widely read bloggers in the Russian segment of LiveJournal. His blog is one of the most commented on too—whenever he touches on a political or other ‘controversial’ topic, the comments flare from several dozens to hundreds, at times reaching well beyond a thousand. The blog, consisting of large quantities of photographs, occasional videos, and minimal textual commentary, covers many topics of national and international interest, of which the war in Gaza was only one, but undoubtedly one of the most affectively and politically loaded. What I found particularly striking about the blog was the amount of readers’ responses as well as their affective intensity. Using LiveJournal’s commenting platform which allows one to leave an unlimited amount of ‘comments’ on each entry, and carrying out threaded conversations akin to forums and ‘bulletin boards’, LiveJournal participants (whether active bloggers themselves or simply registered and unregistered readers) took place in vibrant and passionate debates on Adagamov’s reports on the war in Gaza.⁵ With heavy emphasis on visual materials—photographs of death and destruction that are often believed to act as powerful and unquestionable testimonies (Hirsch 2001)—and with an exceptionally large number of subscribers and commentators, the blog and its comments provide an interesting, albeit often disturbing, insight into the affective fabric of everyday Internet engagement.⁶ It allows us to see—without being ‘representative’ or making claims on ‘the state of public opinion’—how ordinary Internet users respond to extremely violent political events from different degrees of geographic distance or proximity; different personal and collective affiliations; and different affective positions.

It was these debates, in which the photographs of dead and wounded brought outbursts of hatred or joy, compassion or angry rejection thereof, which became the focus of my attention. My initial aim was to map the emotional responses to war and death and to analyse the Russian-language blogosphere as a digital social space where 'political feelings' (Staiger et al. 2010) can unfold in intense and, at times, unpredictable ways. This aim is still in place. However, my focus changed somewhat as the time went by, and I could not bring myself to write about the interactions that had taken part in Adagamov's blog—so intense was the hatred reverberating through web pages and comments, so frequent and striking were the accounts of dehumanisation of both Jews and Arabs. Today, more than two years after the events, when the world's short-span political attention has shifted too many times to count; when Israeli war crimes have been investigated internationally but remained largely unchallenged nationally; when the death and destruction of 2008-2009 are forgotten in the face of ongoing and future atrocities, I am looking at Adagamov's blog again. All the entries, the photographs and almost all the comments (with the few exceptions of those deleted by their authors) are still there. I can relive and retrace the steps of my initial observations without the need for an audiorecorder or a transcriber (the usual tools of an off-line ethnographer) and without looking into field notes. This may sound like the dream of any anthropologist: all the materials fully documented, sitting there, just waiting. Although I cannot view the blog today the way I did two years ago, by seeing the entries in my news feed or by reading the blog itself, scrolling down from newer to older entries, I can access the blog via its on-line archive, neatly sorted by years and months, as provided by the LiveJournal platform. It feels strange. All the raging passions that I remember from my fieldwork two years ago—the hatred, the militancy, the curses, the fights between commentators—are there, yet they seem deadly still, just like the dead bodies in the photographs, which, too, are all still there.

It is this contradiction between affective intensity and deadly stillness as they are captured by and remain in digital archives that lead me to write this article in its current form. Taking a close look at Adagamov's photoblog and its passionate transnational audiences, I ask: What are the affective politics of digital archives of violence and death? What is preserved? What is made hyper visible? What is erased, made to disappear, turned into the ghostly? And what are the links between the ghosting of cyberspace and the ghosting of military and colonial violence?

Digital Archives, Political Feelings, Haunted Futurities

Nearly a decade and a half ago, Paul Virilio (1995, 1997) famously noted that the world of cyberspace is shaped by accelerated speed. Indeed in cyberspace—and even more so in today's increasingly digitalised environments—information, words and feelings can circulate momentarily and instantaneously, creating, as Virilio

suggests, the sense of confusion and loss of orientation (as well as information overload, apathy and indifference). As an ethnographer of Internet cultures, I see this instantaneity everywhere around me: in floods of data on search engines, in virtual flashmobs, in mobile social networks or tweets. This is to mention just a few. However, speed and circulation are only part of the process: texts, images and records of interactions, quick and shifty as they are, do not disappear into oblivion. Rather, speed and circulation co-exist with extensive documentation and preservation—in files, folders, websites, on servers and individual machines. Such preservation turns digitalised feelings, interactions and events into what I elsewhere described as ‘virtual fossils’ (Kuntsman 2009)—frozen in on-line archives, they remain on servers for years. Archaeological artefacts of the present, they can hold still, opening up new future possibilities for remembering and recall. But they are also often forgotten, sometimes as soon as the next day, buried under layers of newer materials and updates.

Scholars of new media and the Internet are becoming increasingly interested in questions of remembering and forgetting. Today’s digital cultures, they note, are structured by obsession with saving, storing and managing data—archival practices that shape both the experience of writing and that of reading digital materials (De Bryun 2010; Eichhorn 2008; Garde-Hansen et al. 2009; Kaelber 2010). As Kate Eichhorn noted in her discussion of blogs as archival genres, ‘to write in a digital age is to write in the archive’, but perhaps also ‘for and even like the archive’ (Eichhorn 2008, n.p., emphasis in the original). Her suggestion to link Derrida’s notion of the archive to digital technologies is echoed by Joanne Garde-Hansen (2009) in her analysis of social networking sites which, as she suggests, only partially answer our ‘archival fever’ and ‘need for archives’ (Derrida 1996).

The question of digital archiving and digital memories is not only that of the past, or even of the simultaneous co-production of past and present (Garde-Hansen 2009). Rather, it is the question of the future. Paul Arthur, for example, notes in his article ‘Saving Lives’ that future historians of our time will have to face an overload of information, but also that much of this information will be difficult to access due to its scattered and temporal nature and the unpredictability and fragility of digital storage (Arthur 2009). The co-existence of information speed and overload in the on-line world with chaotic possibilities of digital archiving are also at the centre of James Gleick’s concerns, when he asks ‘[w]ho, if anyone, will decide which parts of our culture are worth preserving for the hypothetical archaeologists of the future?’ (Gleick 1999, p. 252, cited in Garde-Hansen et al. 2009, p. 7).

The question of digital archives’ futures needs to be explored further. Following Arthur, Garde-Hansen, Gleick and others, I would like to suggest that digital archives are vessels of haunted futurities: they are sites of memory and preservation, but also records of erasure and

void; they are maps of knowledge and interactions, readership and witnessing, but also signs of things to come, of commemoration, or of oblivion. What interests me here, however, is not only the role of technology in shaping futures of memory—be it the (lack) of selectivity of what to save or delete, or the short-lived nature of some websites and platforms. Rather, I would like to turn my attention to the archives themselves, and ask, what kind of archives are they, affectively and politically? Looking at Adagamov's blog from the distance of the past two years—the years of Goldstone report and the controversies surrounding it;⁷ of Israel's deadly storming of the 'Freedom Flotilla';⁸ of the ongoing blockade and military attacks in Gaza and of other 'wars without end' (Mbembe 2003) in the region—I am trying to imagine how narratives and public perceptions of war and death, captured by digital archives, would appear to future historians or archaeologists. I am less interested in speculating about their hypothetical reactions; what I am suggesting instead is that we should try to adopt an imaginary standpoint of a future archaeologist, or rather, of a future advocate of those from whom humanness and the right to life were denied both physically and discursively. Adopting such a viewpoint as both a conceptual and an ethical anchor, we can take haunted futurity as a base for today's transformation to justice and conviviality.

My analytical tools in reading digital archives from this point of an imagined future bring together the notion of haunting with that of affect and political feelings, and are inspired by the work of Ann Cvetkovich and Avery Gordon. Both Cvetkovich and Gordon look at ways of *making the past matter*, especially a past that is erased from traditional history through political forces of slavery, political terror, or heteronormativity. How, then, can we look at the present to make it matter for the future?

Cvetkovich in her *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003), describes 'an archive of feelings' as 'an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception' (2003, p. 7). Focusing on North America during the second half of the 20th century, and on the topic of lesbian sexualities, *An Archive of Feelings* raises broader questions regarding cultural archives as being both *about* and structured *by* feelings.⁹ Cvetkovich's moving book is both about the ways minoritarian politics and lives were shaped by and through feelings, *and* about the ways these lives touch her, the author, and us, the readers.

Like Cvetkovich, my main interest is in the work of affect and emotions and the ways they shape memory and politics, affecting both those immediately involved in violent events (as victims, perpetrators or bystanders) and those touched by an archive of such events. Affect, claims Cvetkovich, is 'the foundation for the formation of public cultures' (2003, p. 8) and as such, it challenges the conventional distinction between political and emotional life. So, too, I

wish to bring to the fore the intertwining of political and emotional life in looking at digital accounts of warfare in Israel-Palestine. It is by addressing the emotionality of the conflict—as it is documented in mundane on-line interactions, and not only in ‘grand’ events such as demonstrations and political speeches—that we can truly grasp the affective and ethical fabric of war and politics; or, in the poignant words of Janet Staiger, ‘[p]erhaps we truly encounter the political only when we *feel*’ (Staiger et al. 2010, p. 4, emphasis in the original).

Another important point of inspiration in Cvetkovich’s work is her attention to archives of feelings as both material and ephemeral. In her case, the material relates to ‘objects that might not ordinarily be considered archival’ (2003, p. 244), and the ephemeral signals the intimate nature of sexuality and also relates to accounts of trauma as *absence*, as trauma ‘often seems to leave behind no records at all’ (2003, p. 7). The digital, too, combines the visible and the invisible, the material and the ephemeral, because of the material-semiotic (Haraway 1997) nature of cyberspace and because on-line words can have performative and psychic power (Kuntsman 2009). But digital archives of war and death also present a very particular constellation of the material and the ephemeral. They can encapsulate and hold still what seem to be both tangible and ungraspable—life and death as well as the political feelings through which these are constituted as meaningful or insignificant, cherished or ungrivable.

These relations between being there and not being there, between being ‘unseen and banished to the periphery of our social graciousness’ and having a ‘seething presence’ (Gordon 1997, p. 196-7) are specifically conceptualised in Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997). Gordon puts forward the notion of haunting as both a form of disappearance (from recognition, from history, from life) and as a political calling—an absent presence that refuses to go away and calls for accountability (see also Gordon in this issue). Similarly, in my reading of Adagamov’s blog as being *about* and structured *by* feelings, I want to turn the attention to ghosting as an *ongoing form of political and affective erasure*, be it through formations of what Gordon in her most recent work has described as ‘social death’ (Gordon, this issue); through the ongoing enterprises of coloniality, militarism and states of exception and the ungrivability they produce (Agathangelou 2010, Biswas & Nair 2010); or through regimes of suspicion and disbelief that shape the changing notions of ‘truth’ and ‘evidence’ in the field of the digital. And similar to Gordon, I want to address haunting not only as a fact of violent disappearing, but also as a form of *presence and a demand for justice*.

Looking at the emotionality of digital archives, and at their ghostliness, I will ask: what kind of futurities do they embed, and what other, *different* futures can we imagine?

Archives of feelings

At the time of the Israeli military offensive in Gaza, Adagamov posted 26 entries on the subject (alongside other entries), some of which contained an extensive number of graphic images of carnage and destruction in Gaza, others showed some photographs of Israeli or Hamas soldiers, and yet few depicted demonstrations against and in support of Israel. All of the entries generated an incredible volume of responses and heated arguments.¹⁰ Some of commentators accused Adagamov of giving preference to Palestinian suffering over that of the Israelis, or of showing too many dead and wounded, or of not showing enough. Many of the commentators were Russian-speaking Israelis who almost exclusively supported their government and argued passionately in defence of Israel's actions. These and other supporters of Israel met sharp criticism from other commentators, whether those were based in Russia, in countries of the former Soviet Union, in the Middle East, or elsewhere around the globe. Some of the discussions focused on the experience of war; many others developed into political debates about the origins and history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Also, not surprisingly for this transnational audience, some of the commentators compared the events in Gaza to Russia's own military actions in Georgia or Chechnya. And lastly, a lot of the comments were a performance of racist hatred: anti-Palestinian sentiment, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.¹¹

My aim in reading Adagamov's blog, however, is not to address Adagamov's representational practices as a web journalist, nor to map the different political positions towards the events as they were expressed in and beyond the blogosphere. Rather, my interest is in this blog as a digital social space, which is both a transnational arena of witnessing violence *and* a space of political feelings. Sasha Torres in her 'Televising Guantanamo' notes that the legal, philosophical and ethical debates on Bush's use of torture miss, or 'only brush up against' the question: 'How does it *feel* to live in a torture state?' (Torres 2010, pp. 45-56, emphasis in the original). Following Torres, I am asking: how does it feel to see photos and reports about destruction and carnage, to be confronted with dead and wounded bodies on one's computer screen? The sheer volume of comments on Adagamov's posts on the Gaza war clearly points to a high degree of emotional investment—taking the time to respond, to engage with the events and to participate in lengthy arguments. However, the actual 'structures of feelings' (Williams 1997) during the events in Gaza require a closer examination.

The discussions in Adagamov's blog contained a wide range of opinions and affective positions: hatred, joy, militancy, disgust, rage, and, less often, sadness and compassion.¹² Could these responses be considered a form of witnessing? And how should we understand the intensity of emotional responses to the photographs, even if, and sometimes precisely when, the affective move was to turn away from

the depicted atrocities; or view them as justified and celebrated violence?

Consider, for example, one of Adagamov's entries on the 27th of December, the first day of the Israeli airstrike. The entry, 'Time for War', contained eighteen horrific images of the outcomes of the strike: ruined buildings, terrified and wounded people, and many, many dead bodies lying on the ground. Yet, instead of horror, shock or grief, the entry generated unprecedented hatred, directed both at the Palestinians themselves as well at those who had been outraged and distressed by the attack. These compassionate audiences were mocked and scorned relentlessly. Some were concrete, in the shape of commentators in the blog who expressed sorrow and shock; and others were imagined, such as in the case of the 'international community'. Israeli actions, on the other hand, were met with joy. 'Great photo', 'excellent news', 'good news, thank you', 'I am satisfied' were among the frequently posted replies. Here is one of the 1266 (!) comments posted in response to this specific entry. The text cited below conjures up many themes that also emerged in other comments: celebration of the attack, patriotic militancy (by Russian-speaking Israelis), dehumanisation of the Palestinians and praise of the Israeli Army:

Thank G-d it began. We waited, asked, hinted for 7 years, but in response they would kidnap a soldier, or send rockets, or shahids. It is what they do—killing Jews, and they are promised 27 virgins for that.

Who is defending Palestine so actively? Who think they know and understand everything about hand-made rockets, and about poor kiddies, sprinkled with mud and pushed towards the cameras, to make the international community feel pity? HAMAS builds its bases near houses. And they fire rockets from these houses' roofs. And they put a couple of kids nearby, so that the pilot who follows an order to eliminate the rocket base would see these [children's] eyes in his sleep, for the rest of his life. They are cowardly dogs, not fighters. Hiding behind their women and children. It was them who broke the ceasefire, not Israel. Russia, by the way, have never notified Chechens or Georgians about its strikes. And Israel sends leaflets, 2 hours before each operation: dear civilians, please go, we are going to strike soon. This is so convenient. Because in this operation most of the dead were in uniforms. And if some civilians were hurt—well, this is inevitable. Lebanon bombed us in the north, civilians died, but no one said a word. And here you feel sorry for the Arab bastards? What a fool. I wish you to have the [sounds of] siren as part of your daily life, maybe then you'll get more brain (27 December, comments on 'Time for War').

The affective and political logic of this text was echoed time and again by many other comments. Jewish sufferings—where, tellingly, soldiers are not distinguished from civilians—were positioned as unacceptable, and therefore as an appropriate reason for the assault.¹³ It also served as a base for identification. The

commentator's last sentence, for example, suggests that anyone living in the constant threat of rocket attacks—as people in the South of Israel did—would feel the same militancy towards the Arabs, and justify the military assault. The invitation to identify and empathise often read like a threat:

And all their [Gazans] 'friends and supporters', all these bastards... I wish them to experience the pleasure of being bombed by Kassams and the rest of this shit. Maybe, when you bury few of your own relatives, killed by these rockets, maybe then you will change your tune (27 December, comments on 'Time for war').

Palestinian suffering, on the other hand, did not carry similar identificatory potential: their actions were presented purely as hatred for the Jews, rather than as various forms of political resistance to Israeli occupation, a colonial regime, and more recently and specifically in the case of Gaza, a blockade and complete control of the borders. Their civilian casualties were dismissed either as an inevitable by-product of war; as a result of the victims own inaction (not responding to Israeli warnings); or as an outcome of HAMAS actions. The death of the combatants was not only not mourned, but celebrated with joy. Many commentators expressed their hopes that the military offensive would continue. 'Please God, do not let this clearing of Gaza from green-flagged donkey-loving Muslims stop', wrote one blogger; 'Gaza should be erased to fucking hell', wrote another (27 December, comments on 'Time for War').

But it is not that compassion and mourning were entirely excluded from the discussion—some of the commentators expressed shock and sadness, and a few lamented: 'Oh God', 'please help us God Almighty', or 'How sad'. Rather, it was the constant dismissal of compassion and recognition of death, or what we can think of as *affective deconstruction of compassion*. One should not feel sorry for the dead Palestinians because they were monsters; or because they were militants; or because their actions endangered Israelis; or because the speaker does not understand the realities of the conflict. This rejection of the very possibility of grief for the Palestinians, coupled with joy, hatred and militancy, is precisely what Butler has conceptualised as differentiated regimes of grievability that distinguish between those worthy of mourning, and those already socially dead; whose deaths do not count and whose mourning is seen as politically threatening (Butler 2004, 2007). Yet unlike the totality of media narratives, described by Butler, where grief was only assigned to some bodies and some nations, the social space of the blogosphere acted as an *affective battlefield*, where grief was offered and rejected, bargained and calculated. 'What a heartbreaking scene, oh oh oh', one blogger commented on the 'Time for War' entry. 'But where were you, Rustem, when Israel was bombed with Kassams? On holiday?' (27 December, comments on 'Time for War'). In these and other comments, the respondents were engaged in what can best be described as calculating the political and affective value of blood and bodies. The possible recognition of Palestinian suffering—whether for

civilian casualties or the mass killing of a large number of soldiers—was insistently countered with references to Israeli casualties. Adagamov was accused of presenting a one-sided picture by not showing Sderot and other southern towns of Israel. Some even suggested that the horrific pictures of dead and wounded from Gaza have to be 'balanced' by photographs of blown up buses in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem or the Tel Aviv dancing club, *Dolphinarium*, where 16 Israeli teenagers died in a terrorist attack in 2001.

But perhaps the most violent rejection of grief, mourning and compassion was based on feelings of doubt and suspicion. Many commentators questioned the numbers of casualties, reported by the media and cited in Adagamov's blog. One blogger, for example, in a chillingly dehumanising move, describe the Palestinian dead as 'liquidated': 'Most likely, the number of those liquidated is three times smaller' (27 December, comments on 'They Turned on the Response'). But it was not merely the scale of the carnage that was debated or doubted; rather, the photographs themselves were suspected of being staged and/or digitally modified. Several commentators noted that they saw the same faces in photographs of different events. 'You should not worry about the Palestinian brothers, they are immortal', wrote one of them. 'Otherwise, how come I see the same faces over and over, for many years? Beautiful lighting, expressive poses, etc. For the next war, one should study Photoshop and not combat!' (27 December, comments on 'Time for War'). The enactment of suspicion through distinction—which photo is real and which is not—was sometimes performed with a chilling demonstration of 'expertise' on which dead bodies were thought to be real and which were staged:

I automatically thought the first photo was a Photoshop.

What amazes me is how quick the Palestinian photographers are. They gathered this high quality material so quickly that one begins to doubt its authenticity. It feels like everything was photographed in advance, to allow quick publication of the photos when needed.

More staged photos??? Honestly, enoughhhhhh.....

Many photos.... They don't look natural. The second one, for example, is a definite photoshop.

(27 December, comments on 'Time for War').

Doubt and suspicion, coupled with patriotic militancy, can be seen as a move that diverts attention away from the encounter with death, from horror, and most importantly, from responsibility. It is yet another affective and political practice that makes ungrievable lives and marks some populations as nothing but military targets. But doubt and suspicion also point to the broader issue of witnessing horror in new media environments, where every piece of visual or audio evidence is

always already suspected of being digitally altered and thus doctored and untrue.

As my discussion in this section has demonstrated, hatred, joy, suspicion and rejection of compassion demonstrate what it *feels like* to live in the world of war (this was particularly true for the Russian Israelis whose state was carrying out the war on their behalf, and some of whom participated in Israeli military service themselves) as well as what it feels like to witness it on computer screens. These feelings are the lived affective fabrics of the digital cultures' struggle over what constitutes reality (Ferreday forthcoming) and they are also what make the political regimes of violence and grievability in Israel-Palestine.

So what about the archiving? I want to return to Cvetkovich's (2003) notion of the archive, and in particular, to her move to create an archive of feeling where there isn't one, working against social marginalisation, erasure and silencing (as is the case of lesbian cultures explored in her book). What Adagamov's blog can present to a future archaeologist is a *digital archive of feelings*. As an archive *about* feelings, the blogs can act as a cultural repository that holds a record of disturbing emotions surrounding the Gaza war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more broadly. But if understood as an archive *structured by* feelings, the blog can also carry a potentiality of feeling differently, because it so powerfully animates the affective logic through which political cruelty is sustained. Adagamov's blog can work affectively to offer a different touch of violence and war, one that is not based on hatred or suspicion. This is because its affective fabric exposes the ways the racialised logic of coloniality and war erases one's pain and denies one's humanity; the way killings are legitimated and political violence normalised as necessary, and the ways military terror is insistently turned into a noble mission of protecting the innocent.

Archives of Haunting

Archives of feelings, as Cvetkovich reminds us, are both material and ephemeral. Or in other words, they are always about both presence and absence. So far I have concentrated on what was profusely present in Adagamov's blog: feelings of hatred, militancy and suspicion. Dead and wounded bodies were, too, present in abundance. But their hypervisibility, paradoxically, co-existed with disappearance—they were there and not there; brutalised yet not referred to as suffering victims; bleeding all over the computer screen, yet rendered inhuman or a fake. Indeed, if we take a close look at many of the responses to Adagamov's photographic reports, we will notice what I can best describe as *ghosting of the present*: denying the Palestinian victims their pain and their humanness and envisioning their deaths as not only ungrievable but inevitable and even necessary, turning them into ghosts *while alive*.

borderlands 10:2

In the discussions of casualties, which were particularly intense in the first days of the military offensive, the Palestinians often appeared as non-human: they were called non-people, dogs, beasts, vermin, bitches, bastards and scum, and even figured as immaterial objects. For example, in comments to the entry 'They Turned on the Response'—the first one that appeared shortly after Israel launched the attack—one commentator insisted that the attack was not an act of killing but deactivation of a weapon:

They already talk about 155 dead.

Not dead, deactivated.

'Update: killing at least 195 people'.

195 units of enemy's life force has been deactivated.

(27 December, comments on 'They turned on the Response').

Another commentator in the same discussion thread hatefully noted: 'Now they report about 155 combatants, but later they will start wailing about how half of them are children'. As if pre-empting the critique of the Israeli assault, other respondents repeatedly stated that all those killed in the air strike—and in fact, most Gazans and Palestinians in general—cannot be considered civilians or 'peaceful residents' to use the Russian expression. This is because they are either active combatants or their supporters. This move made them terrorists by association, by definition, thus turning Palestinians into a killable target. Here, for example, is one typical exchange between commentators, discussing the deadly outcomes of the Israeli airstrike:

Hey, people! Stop generalising! According to the Palestinian media, among these 210 dead, at least 148 are civilians, among them 18 children aged under 15, 29 women aged under 50, and 13 elderly men and women over 70. Are these all 'bastards' that can be killed without distinction?

And how many of these 'civilians'—elderly, women and children—were prepared to put on the 'shahid's belt' [belt with explosives used by some suicide bombers]? And how many have joyfully supported their brother/sister/father/mother/friend, who had put on such a belt?

If Arabs lived quietly, not claiming what is not theirs—they wouldn't be dying.

(27 December, comments on 'They turned on the Response').

In this and other similar discussions of the carnage, the 'death-world' (Mbembe 2003, p. 40) of Gaza was extended above and beyond those already killed in the entire Palestinian population, destined for death. As another commentator stated, 'There are no peaceful

Palestinians. They are all terrorists—women, children, and elderly. They should all be buried in the ruins' (15 January, comments on 'War in Gaza (3)'). Nurtured by hatred and militancy, the affective world of war in cyberspace embraced 'new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the living dead' (Mbembe 2003, p. 40). Mbembe describes these conditions as *necropolitics*: unlike Foucault's notion of biopolitics (2007 [1977-78]) as the governance of life, Mbembe's necropolitics is about the governance of death; in this case, turning the entire population into moving targets of legitimate killing.

Another necropolitical move of claiming the permissibility and desirability of killing was the shift of responsibility from Israeli forces to the Palestinians themselves. Some suggested that the Palestinians were to blame for the civilian casualties (particularly the children), because the parents were not protecting them enough. Debating the high number of injured children, one commentator noted: 'Well, then this was their parent's choice, when they decided to ignore the warning about the attack' (4 January, comments on 'Chronicles of War'). He was referring to the so-called warning leaflets that the Israeli army distributes to Gaza by air (and sometimes by phone), announcing the forthcoming attack on military targets. This obscures the fact that in the overcrowded city of Gaza there is nowhere to hide, even when the time of the next attack is known. The leaflets are widely used by Israel to claim the 'humanity' of its army and to demonstrate its concerns for innocent civilians.

Others noted that non-combatant casualties occurred because Hamas was using the civilian population as a living shield. 'HAMAS is shooting at Israeli kindergartens with 'Katjushas', and puts explosives into Palestinian schools, with the pupils in it', wrote one commentator. In this situation the Israeli army simply *must* annihilate them' (11 January, comments on 'The War Continues', emphasis added). Comments like this also reiterate, time and again, that as terrorists, the Palestinians 'invite' a military assault, making it not only justifiable violence, but a moral imperative.

But it was not only the ghosting of the present—turning the whole population of Gaza into the living dead—but also, importantly, the ghosting of the future. Palestinians, viewed as responsible for their own suffering and inviting more and more attacks, were haunted by their future of inevitable death. Their future death was seen as the immediate condition of Israel's peaceful life—as one of the commentators put it, 'The more of these bastards die, the quieter it will be in Sderot and the area' (27 December, comments on 'They Turned on the Response'). This vision of Palestinians who have to die and whose very future should be prevented from happening, surfaced time and again in the comments. Here are two most telling examples:

borderlands 10:2

This child is of course not guilty. But if the child grows into yet another terrorist, so it may be even better that he dies before turning into a fighter.

(29 December, Comments on 'War on New Year's Eve')

I think Jews with all their high technologies could find a way to assassinate this leader without [killing] his family. I understand everything, but one does not have to act like terrorists.

Any of his children is a future terrorist.

(1 January, comments on 'The War in Gaza'/assassination of Nizar Ra'ayan and his family).

In these and many other discussions, the Palestinians became a population of ghosts, living in the shadow of forthcoming death which at the same time is continuously disregarded, either because they are seen as monsters, whose actions call for necessary military intervention, and whose suicidal desire to kill and die is their own fault and of their own making. Or, they are seen as inevitable victims of their own leaders, who willingly and stubbornly sacrifice their civilians. But they are also seen as a threat to the future of Israel, as a people *needing* to be annihilated in order to allow this future to arrive. Yet their presence—or rather, their deaths—is also necessary for such a future. To use Agathangelou's words, their 'pain, violence and dying are transformed into future modes of the good life' (2010, p. 188)

Gordon in her book, *Ghostly Matters* (1997) notes that ghosts are a form of absent presence. Lurking beyond our established theoretical, political and affective fields of vision, they demand change in the ways we think and live. Haunting, as Gordon reminds us, is both a form of epistemology and a structure of feeling that merges the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the ungraspable, creating that particular form of affective sociality of living with ghosts, and maybe, but only maybe, being able to fully comprehend their existence. Haunted by the dead—those 'lost subjects of history' (Gordon 1997, p. 195)—we learn about contested records of old times and about the demands violent pasts can make on the present. But what about ghosts of the present? What about those whom Butler describes as lost to life while living (Butler 2004, 2007); whom Anna Agathangelou et al. (2008) in their discussion of 'intimate investments' in violence address as 'most killable' by empire's seductive carnage, and whom Mbembe (2003), in his poignant notion of necropolitics, calls the living dead; those populations whose lives are governed through necropower, where life conditions are built through 'topographies of cruelty' where the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom are almost indistinguishable? In other words, what about those who, living with the ongoing threat of death and annihilation, are in a way, *made into ghosts while alive* by various regimes of coloniality and war?

One way to look at ghosts of the present in a politically transformative way is to make visible the 'thanatopolitics' of their ghosting—the ways they are made to 'die again and again, in such a way that the process of dying and the death of these bodies constitute the foundational ontological subsidy' in the creation of colonial body, life and future (Agathangelou 2010, p. 207). But we must also think about the transformative possibilities of their presence in cyberspace. When the physical killing reverberates through the deadly stillness of bodies in timeless on-line archives, ghosts of the present become ghosts of the future. They may be temporarily forgotten on Internet servers, or retrieved for renewed circulation, but they are always there and, in their refusal to disappear, they come to *disturb* the future, calling for a post-mortem justice which is denied them in the present.

The logic of ghosting the present and of haunted futurity calls into question the usefulness of 'representation' as a conceptual framework to understand the ways wars are witnessed, mediated and experienced in new media environments. If we were to look at Adagamov's representational practices we would notice enough attention to Palestinian suffering (this is why he was repeatedly accused of presenting a one-sided picture by his Israeli commentators). Understood as an archive in the simple sense, his blog would provide the future advocate with rich evidence of how the injustice and the brutality of the Gaza war was represented in digital media. If, however, such a future advocate would follow Gordon's insight and look for 'ghostly matters' and treat ghosts with respect, acknowledging their presence and answering their calling, a different picture would emerge. It would be a picture where the logic of disappearance reveals the cynicism of on-line suspicion and the brutality of war and colonial politics, rendering the death that is right in front of our eyes justifiable, insignificant or not even real. But it would also be a logic that is open to other 'ways of seeing' (Berger 1990), looking for what can emerge from the gap between the visible and the invisible, between the materiality of death and ephemeral digital feelings. It would be a future archive of haunting, calling for accountability and justice for those from whom humanness and the right to life were denied, once on the battlefield, and once in cyberspace.

Responsibility for the Future

Although no archive is ever finished or accurate, I have briefly demonstrated in my discussion of suspicion that digital archives generate particularly intense cultural anxieties regarding authenticity, truth, origins, reproducibility and transmission. As such, they are not merely a repository of data, based on documentation, preservation, ordering and records, however incomplete and fragile. They are also objects of feelings—of possession, of nostalgia (Kuntsman 2007), of mourning, of doubt—as well as archives of feelings—'talismans that carry the affective weight of the past' (Cvetkovich 2008, p. 120). Describing the archives of the gay and lesbian public at the time of the

AIDS crisis, Cvetkovich notes how they ‘raced against death to preserve a record of lives and publics’ and how their insistence on documenting everyday life in its objects and ephemera was about the insistence that ‘every life is worth preservation’ (2003, p. 269). Digital archives of the debates about the Gaza war in the Russian-language blogosphere are a different story. Very few people in the discussions I observed seemed to have insisted that ‘every life is worth preservation’—on the contrary, as my article has demonstrated, the value of life and the meaning of death were unequally distributed along geographical and racial lines. And yet, I find Cvetkovich’s attention to archives as race against death profoundly moving and inspirational for the kind of future that I would like to imagine. In reading Adagamov’s commentators against the grain and in the very process of writing this article I hope to have created a *different* archive of feelings; one based on an attempt to ‘disrupt thanatologies’ (Agathangelou 2010) and to denaturalise the affective cruelty of colonialism and war.

My vision of the archive here is not that of simple preservation, or of a prosthetic digital memory. It is, first and foremost, a political project of racing against death and resisting the deadly logic of raciality and militarism. For the future archaeologist, digital archives of feelings and their future hauntings could become objects of what Marianne Hirsch coined ‘postmemory’ (2001): traumatic memories of horrific events, experienced by the following generation through mediated objects, such as photographs, which can (re)appear in front of future generations. They could act not only as records of political feelings, but also as ‘cyberscapes of memory and commemoration’ (Kuntsman 2010), as virtual traumascapes (Kaelber 2010) and as mediators of remembering (De Bryun 2010).

I am not trying to put forward a particular scenario here, nor chart what the future might or should be. Rather, my point is that these archives already embed the future. They are pregnant with the further violence of oblivion, but are also open to possibilities for change and transformation. After all, as Jacques Derrida reminds us in his *Archival Fever*, ‘[T]he question of the archive is not [...] a question of the past. [...] It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow’ (Derrida 1996, p. 36). It is with this notion of future responsibility that I would like to conclude my article, turning to haunting as a form of future ethics and a call for action. Acknowledging the erasure and refusing to let the ghost go is, as Gordon insists, our responsibility to it. Being haunted, she notes, is not so much a psychic state as it is a mobilising force:

Haunting, unlike trauma by contrast, is distinctive for producing a *something-to-be-done*. Indeed, it seemed to me that haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and the rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of

leaving, when disturbed feelings won't go away, when easily living one day and then the next becomes impossible, when the present seamlessly becoming 'the future' gets entirely jammed up (Gordon, this issue, emphasis mine).

Adagamov's blogging entries on Gaza are haunted by the accounts of destruction and killings, as well as by the 'affective weight' (Cvetkovich 2008, p. 120) of their hateful celebrations. Haunting, here, refers to those who have been dehumanised and eradicated twice—through military operations and then through digital structures of feelings—and yet refuse to go away, remaining in circulation in digital archives as ghost in the machine, as phantoms of future memory. Ghosting of the present refers to those whose very existence is believed to threaten the future: haunted futurities of inevitable deaths and of a better Israeli future without the Palestinians. And yet they, too, refuse to go away, staying alive as virtual fossils, 'jamming up' the future, and demanding responsibility (even if the colonial state would not claim it and its citizens will not acknowledge it). It is these ghosts of the future that we are accountable to.

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Acknowledgements

This article is part of a larger project on Internet, transnationalism and affect (2009-2011), sponsored by the Leverhulme Trust. Versions of this article and related research were presented at the *Haunted Futurities* international symposium (Manchester, 2009); the American Anthropological Association's annual convention (Philadelphia, 2009); *Affective Fabrics of Digital Cultures: Feelings, Technologies, Politics* (Manchester, 2010) and a departmental seminar at the Department of Anthropology, the University of Manchester (2010). I am thankful to audiences of these events for their comments, and for helping me analyse my archives and crystallise my argument. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers of *borderlands* for their demanding criticism of the earlier version of this article, and their insightful suggestions. And lastly, my gratitude goes to Debra Ferreday, Athina Karatzogianni and Yehudit Kirstein Keshet for their sharp and perceptive comments and editorial help.

Notes

¹ Russian-language blogosphere LiveJournal, the most popular blogging server in Russian, brings together Russian-speaking Internet users from Russia, countries of the former Soviet Union, also known as the 'near diaspora', and the émigré diasporas such as Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel or the US. The specificity of this blogosphere as a post-Soviet 'diaspora space' (Brah 1996), ridden with tensions and past and present conflicts, is discussed in detail in Kuntsman (2010).

² The blog is written in Russian. All translations from the blog are mine.

³ Adagamov's interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could partly be described by a large number of post-Soviet émigré Jews currently living in Israel, whose presence brings this particular conflict closer to Russian Internet readers.

⁴ At the time of the war in Gaza it had over 32,000 subscribers; two years later, in March 2011, the number reached 60,000 and is constantly growing; the blog is also read by many others who do not register as subscribers (allowing them to see the blog's updates in their news feed) yet still visit, read and comment in the blog.

⁵ Adagamov himself was not based in the Middle East. Most of his photographs on the Gaza war (as well as of the other topics covered in the blog) come from international news agencies.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of affective fabrics of digital cultures, see Kuntsman forthcoming.

⁷ In 2009, following the grave devastation and mass killing caused by Israeli military forces in Gaza, the UN Human Rights Council began an investigation, led by Richard Goldstone. The investigation concluded that both Hamas and Israel committed war crimes, and caused outrage in Israel (since Israel did not, and still does not, take responsibility for mass civilian casualties, claiming that they were unintentional). In 2011, after Israel's own investigation, and possibly also due to pressure from international Jewish organisations, Goldstone issued a statement claiming that the report would have been different, had Israel cooperated with it. In Israel, the statement was widely perceived as an 'apology' and retraction from earlier accusations.

⁸ In May 2010 the flotilla, organized by the 'Free Gaza Movement' and the 'Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief' (İHH), departed from Turkey towards Gaza, carrying humanitarian aid, with the intention of breaking Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. On the night of 31 May, Israeli naval commandos intercepted and stormed the ships, killing nine activists and injuring others.

⁹ I thank the anonymous reviewer of *borderlands* for drawing my attention to this point.

¹⁰ Among all the entries on the topic, the smallest number of comments was 183 and the largest was 1266.

¹¹ On the eerie similarities between anti-Arab and anti-Jewish comments, see chapter 2 in Kuntsman (2009).

¹² These also changed as the warfare continued and escalated. For example, while the earlier entries were dominated by hatred, militancy and joy in the face of deadly Israeli attacks, later discussions also showed more critical voices, condemning the killing of civilians and the scale of the destruction in Gaza. It may have been because international opinion shifted as the Israeli atrocities escalated – however, the reason for such change could also have been that the Russian-Israeli users who were very vocal in the early days of the offensive (seeing Adagamov's blog as an important platform for anti-Palestinian information warfare), later moved their activities elsewhere in the blogosphere.

¹³ Since its start and even now, despite growing critique from within and outside the country, Israel claimed that Operation Cast Lead was a defence mission.

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Appendix: Detailed summary of Adagamov's entries on the events in Gaza in 2008-2009

All entries were read in real time as they appeared in 2008-2009, revisited again in October-November 2010 and then in March 2011.

Title	Date	Time	N. of comments	URL
The ceasefire is over	21/12/2008	15:10:00	391	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2804435.html
They switched on the response	27/12/2008	13:39:00	679	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2810399.html
Time for war	27/12/2008	20:49:00	1266	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2811069.html
Out with your thins	28/12/2008	19:11:00	238	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2812038.html
War on New Year's Eve	29/12/2008	13:55:00	484	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2813393.html
Norway news	29/12/2008	21:51:00	411	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2814221.html
Israel vs. Hamas	30/12/2008	21:04:00	715	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2814596.html
War in Gaza	01/01/2009	18:59:00	575	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2815752.html
Protesters in kufias	02/01/2009	14:48:00	509	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2816062.html
Hey hoy soldiers	03/01/2009	22:28:00	713	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2816951.html
War in Gaza	04/01/2009	00:25:00	385	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2817105.html
War in Gaza (2)	04/01/2009	10:29:00	460	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2817458.html
Chronicles of war	04/01/2009	15:14:00	1176	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2817585.html
The rocket is coming	07/01/2009	20:08:00	709	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2820408.html
Norway news (2)	08/01/2009	20:03:00	183	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2822096.html
Chronicles of war (2)	08/01/2009	22:38:00	648	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2822291.html
Stand up, damned of the Earth	09/01/2009	16:32:00	333	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2823416.html
The war continues	11/01/2009	16:49:00	1037	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2825312.html
Way on the streets of Norway	12/01/2009	18:20:00	1140	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2826876.html
The one who did not shoot	12/01/2009	20:56:00	529	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2827247.html
Rally in support of Israel	13/01/2009	23:54:00	230	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2830008.html
War in Gaza (3)	15/01/2009	16:49:00	726	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2833026.html
Norway news (3)	17/01/2009	20:18:00	478	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2836894.html
An announcement	18/01/2009	10:23:00	271	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2837753.html
The vigil near the Yauz gate	18/01/2009	18:56:00	1113	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2838023.html
Heil Nasrallah	18/01/2009	22:47:00	758	http://drugoi.livejournal.com/2838399.html