Gendered Voice in Palestinian Women Bloggers' Narratives: A Postcolonial Feminist

Approach to Women Writing in Occupied Spaces

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This thesis is presented for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Arts

Murdoch University

August 2018

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

In the last two decades, the online space has afforded Palestinians a significant platform for self-representation. The space has allowed for narratives of national identity to emerge, where memories can be evoked, home can be reconstructed and imagined, and an everyday narrative of the conflict is made available to local and global interlocutors. This thesis examines the online narratives of Palestinian women bloggers who are writing from positions of anticolonial struggle, and explores the ways in which gender is written into and represented by their narratives. Importantly, the blogs analysed in this thesis are treated as forms of online life writing. Conceiving of women's online narratives in this way means approaching the question of gender by engaging with the grounded experiences of Palestinian women whose personal accounts provide not only the opportunity to write witness narratives, but also to negotiate, disrupt and subvert stories of the nation. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, and drawing extensively on the work of critical scholars, the work considers how these women's writing enables them to negotiate their gendered identities and their feminist concerns in a political context where questions of the nation are prioritised, and where women have typically been assigned a primarily symbolic significance in bearing the nation biologically and culturally. This negotiation manifests itself in the ways in which these women write alternative ways of narrating and imagining the nation, as the bloggers question their previously assigned roles in the national struggle. In this way, the thesis also reveals the women's imaginative and creative role in the larger dynamic struggle between politics and narrative, as they stand at the intersection of colonial, orientalist, nationalist and gendered constructions of the nation.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors Anne Surma and Helena Grehan. The writing of this thesis would have been impossible without their professional guidance, their valuable, thorough, and critical feedback as well as their continuous support throughout this journey. Thank you for giving me just enough guidance to find my voice, for listening to my incoherent arguments, and for reassuring me that "life does happen" during a PhD. I have been very lucky to have two outstanding academics who knew what it means to be a new mother and a PhD candidate.

I am indebted to my husband, Ayman, who never hesitated for a second, when I was awarded the scholarship, to leave everything behind and be my companion on this long journey. Thank you, for believing in me. I am also thankful for my other companion, Tamim, who was born in my first year of candidature, and who taught me a lot about feminism and academia.

My family in Gaza were my refuge and my source of strength; most importantly, my sister, Najlaa, who still managed to make me laugh during the hardest of times. My mother might never brag to her neighbours about her daughter, who is a doctor, but I am sure she would be proud. My aunt Salwa, my second mother, who despite the distance provided the support and without which I would not have come this far.

I am grateful for my PhD companions, Samya, Rusaila, Walaa and Victoria, who supported me in different ways: by reading my work, babysitting Tamim, or offering to listen. I wish to also acknowledge my two virtual writing groups, the PhD and Early Career Researcher Parents group and the Virtual SUAW-Parents Edition group. Both communities of outstanding researchers made of this PhD a less isolating experience.

I also acknowledge the support of all my friends in Perth who made it easier to settle in a new country. I am indebted to Maggie, the answer to my mother prayers, for her kind companionship and her endless supply of tea.

Dedication

To my mother, Howaida,

who made a garden of our rooftop satellite dishes

May your soul rest in peace.

Prologue

Three Wars Ago

"Here, I was born." This was the title I chose for my own blog in 2010. I was a recent graduate of English Literature from the Islamic University of Gaza, and I was inspired by a teacher who believed that "Palestine is a story away" (Alareer 2014, 15). I started the blog a year after the first Israeli military offensive against Gaza in 2008/2009, and following twenty-three days of horror that resulted in an epiphany.[1] In those nights, during the offensive, and as the bombing intensified, my family and I would grab mattresses, pillows, blankets, and whatever identification papers my mother could stuff into my father's eighties-style Samsonite, and we would descend to the room downstairs. The nights were dark and cold, only lit by the non-stop shelling and the shallow candlelight. The room was crammed, as my extended family who lived in our three-storey building all gathered to sleep. I cannot quite remember who convinced us then that it was a safe haven. And when everyone decided to stop talking and try to sleep, I would start reading. Solaced by the one and only one book that I kept reading over and over, I tried to ignore my mother's frowns: she was concerned the candlelight would kill me. It was then I developed a fascination for Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, since his *Memory for Forgetfulness* was my war companion. He, too, lived a war. He, also, wanted to survive to make a cup of morning coffee (Darwish 1995).

Writing became inevitable. It was a means of survival. It was not so much a way of trying to educate the world about the largest open-air prison, or advocate for "the cause." It was

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[1] Hama Abu-Kishk (2018) reports that one of the most significant reasons for the growing numbers of blogs in Gaza was this military offensive, known as Operation Cast Lead, which resulted in an urgent need for reports from the ground. Abu-Kishk (2018, 100) states that "the internet was virtually the only means Gazans had to break through their isolation, turning independent bloggers into a nearly exclusive unofficial source of information."

rather an outlet for my anger. My words were the screaming voice of my own silence, my inability to speak or to be heard. They were how I tried to make sense of who I am, why I am here, and why now. In a blog from 2010, on the second anniversary of Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli offensive launched on Gaza, I wrote: "A war ago, I wouldn't have thought about writing this, about writing anything. Today, trembling, recalling, I find it an obligation to write the details of it no matter how trivial it might sound for I have to survive; we shall survive."

I started the blog as a way of going beyond my confined space; somehow, the blog and the possibilities it opened gave me a degree of freedom that I was otherwise deprived of, being unable to go beyond the 365 square kilometres that was the Gaza Strip. I started writing about the mundane daily experiences of what it means to live through confinement, border-crossings, the bombing next door, the revolution next door, the book my mother smuggled to me through a tunnel, and my mother's battle with both cancer and Israeli military permits.

It was during the Egyptian revolution that online platforms, including blogs, began to gain momentum as a valuable activist tool in the Middle East. The impact of those tools of resistance reverberated across the region and beyond. I took part in youth-led grassroots initiatives, which brought together Palestinian bloggers in the Gaza Strip and aimed at writing our voices as Palestinians, utilising the different online platforms as a way of reclaiming an alternative, virtual space and of declaring our right to speak back to mainstream media representations of Palestinians. During that time, these platforms were also gradually being recognised and drawn on in mainstream media, albeit in limited ways.

In 2012, during Israel's second large-scale military offensive on Gaza, "Operation Pillar of Defence", I watched as CNN interviewed a Gaza blogger, my friend Mohammed Suliman. The screen split in two, streaming from two locations only miles away from each other. On

the left was Mohammed talking from his home in Gaza about the intense bombing, and about not feeling safe under intense F16 bombardment. On the right was Ashkelon Resident Nissim Nahoom, also talking about the life-threatening missiles fired by Hamas militants, while the news anchor was mediating the discussion. In the midst of this report, typical of mainstream media representations of the Palestine/Israel question as an ongoing cycle of violence, and as though it involves two equal but contesting narratives, a Palestinian story and an Israeli story, the anchor asks, "Who is to blame?" As Mohammed is asked to reply to the Israeli story, the noise in the background intensifies, and his voice is almost silenced by the deafening noise of the intense bombing. Mohammed tries to ignore the very first blasts and carries on with the conversation. "I am not going to allow these bombs to interrupt me," he insists, "from having this debate … Let's get this game of who is the victim and who is the victimiser out of the way so we can talk about more substantial issues." One last explosion knocks Mohammed off his chair, and he goes offline.

Mohammed's voice was not only silenced by the Israeli warplanes, but by brief news segments, which operate in order to exhaust Palestinian narratives with questions that presume the situation is an endless cycle of violence, and with counter-narratives to the Zionist narrative of the conflict. Therefore, it is true that online platforms such as blogs responded to the need for counter-narratives and circumvented the restrictions of decontextualised and dehistoricised Western media representations that claimed to be 'objective.' However, these platforms also allowed for a Palestinian story to be told without the obligation to justify not 'telling the Israeli story as well.'

For me, then, blogging also meant participating in formulating a nationalist narrative, as new platforms started opening up. However, at first, I had not really thought about my identity as a woman as I took part in the process of writing the nation. It was in 2012, upon my return with a Master's degree from England that this realisation took place. Applying

to teach at a university in Gaza, I was refused the position on explicitly sexist grounds. I was told that as a woman I did not conform to the accepted codes of conduct and dress by the university. As a result, I wrote my first gender-themed blog addressing the dynamics of patriarchy within academic institutions in Gaza. To my absolute horror, the same Palestinian people who had previously hailed me for writing about my national identity were now condemning my apparently Western-driven feminist blog. I was accused of being Westernised. It was then that I realised that I had never before considered my gendered voice as I wrote of home. In the following year, I navigated the questions of feminism and nationalism and the tension those two terms evoke as I worked closely with women at the Centre for Women's Rights at the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights in Gaza. I documented women's narratives of the Israeli aggression of 2012, and its gendered implications. At the same time, I worked on recording domestic violence against women, investigating cases of honour killing, and witnessing first-hand the secrecy with which such topics were dealt. In the process, I learned of the embeddedness of gender discrimination in the legal system, as a result of which Palestinian women continue to occupy subordinate positions in most areas of public and private life.

The question of blogging, nationalism and feminism has unfolded a broader body of literature by both Palestinian women and Arab Muslim women on issues of women's writing, patriarchy and nationalism. And it was on this basis that I started formulating the initial questions for my research: Is there a way that online platforms, particularly blogs, can give voice to women's gendered identities, hitherto largely silenced for the sake of the Palestinian nation? How do women insert their voices into online narratives, which exhibit highly nationalist sentiments? How do women produce narratives that go beyond the dedicated roles assigned to them as symbolic mothers of the nation without being condemned as Westernised traitors?

Stuart Hall argues that "we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context', *positioned*" (Hall 1994, 222; emphasis in original). This Prologue acknowledges my situated, subjective position as I read and reflect critically on these narratives as a Palestinian, as a woman, and as a blogger.

Chapter 1. Introduction: Palestinian Women Bloggers: Crossing Colonial, Patriarchal, and Generic Borders

Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story.

(bell hooks 1989, 43)

In March 2018, Palestinian women across the Gaza Strip took part in the Great Return March,[1] in which thousands of Palestinians staged a mass sit-in, with dozens of tents erected along the fence between Gaza and Israel. These peaceful protests, the largest mass protest Gaza has witnessed since the first Uprising (Intifada),[2] took different shapes and demanded the right of return based on the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.[3] The protests were continuously met with violence. In Australia, as I eagerly followed the news from home reporting the devastating number of protestors killed and the thousands of others injured by Israeli snipers deployed along the border, I came across an image, circulating online, of Palestinian women throwing stones across the fence. The photo itself speaks of the diverse roles women have played as they continue to take part in the nationalist struggle; it is a very recent example of women's active participation in resistance to Israeli occupation. However, in an attempt to warn women from taking part in these protests, Israeli army spokesman Avechay Adraee used this image to issue a public warning to the Palestinians, framing the protestors not only as terrorists and vandals but as women who are "morally corrupt" and who "lack honour."

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[1] Thousands of Palestinians in Gaza took to the buffer area along the Gaza–Israel fence to participate in the protests, which commenced on Friday the 30th of March and continued for several weeks.

[2] The Palestinian Uprising of 1987, known as the first *Intifada,* was the first movement of mass political resistance by Palestinians. The uprising, which lasted for years and was waged by stones and acts of civil disobedience, ended with the beginning of the peace process in the 1990s (Hunter 1993).

[3] United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 states that "refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible." See
https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A.

Adraee's post was screenshot and circulated through the Facebook page of The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, "Adala," where his rhetoric was derided (see figure 1). Palestinian activists and feminists ridiculed this recent example of Israeli propaganda directed at Palestinian women for its explicit patriarchal content objectifying women, and reminding them of their "proper place."
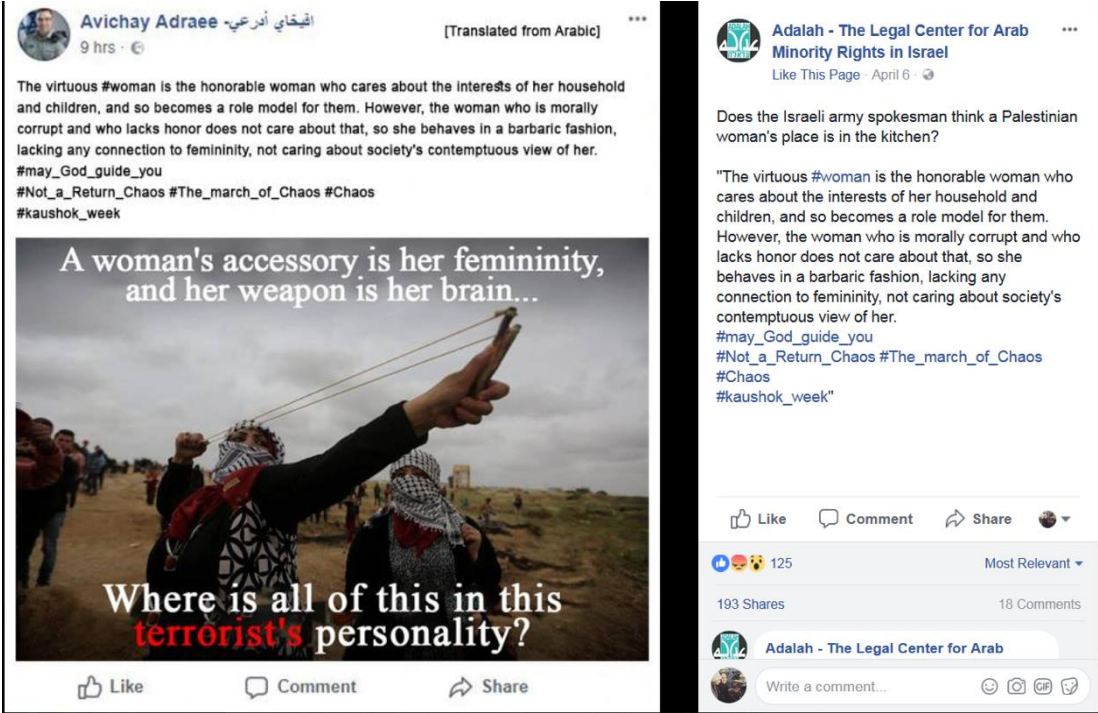
Figure 1 Screenshot of Adala Facebook Post

In many ways, this post spoke directly to the focus of my research, that is, to a consideration of the ways in which images of Palestinian women have long been shaped and constructed by competing patriarchal colonialist and nationalist narratives, and to women's long resistance to such discourses. The photo was also circulating in a space I discuss in this thesis as one that has given Palestinians relative freedom and mobility largely denied to them offline. Nonetheless, this space has, in many instances, been co-opted to replicate gendered representations of women that persist to this day in both the virtual and material worlds. Adraee's statement is charged with patriarchal and cultural prejudices that have long dominated the lives of Palestinian women, such as honour, dishonour, morality and virtue. He relegates women's roles to the

sphere of the household, and privileges their maternal roles of birthing and rearing the nation. He creates a binary in which women are deemed honourable, virtuous, and moral if they remain within that maternal feminine space, but "barbaric", "terrorists", and "lacking femininity" if they dare cross the border. Adraee's harnessing notions of proper femininity and women's roles speaks emphatically to the significance of gender in relation to Palestinian nationalist narratives.

Thus, a Palestinian woman shown catapulting a stone across the border deconstructs the traditional notion of femininity, as it relates to the weak colonised subject regardless of gender. According to such binary discourse, women acting in this way forego their femininity, their womanhood, and are viewed as "barbaric" and terrorist others. However, Adraee's ambiguous use of the term "society" without referring to which society he means—Palestinian or Israeli— also speaks to his attempt to address a Palestinian nationalist narrative, itself embedded in patriarchal notions of honour. This has been a policy that Israel has long applied in dealing with Palestinian women involved in the struggle and which it continues to apply today in its daily colonial practices. In several recent instances,[4] many Palestinian women activists were arrested by Israeli forces along with their fathers, a policy which reinforces the belief that these women are the responsibility of the male figure of the family and that these men have to keep their women under their control for their own protection.

In this thesis, through a combined feminist and postcolonial approach, I focus on the online narratives of Palestinian women bloggers. I highlight the importance of exploring how Palestinian women write themselves while also being consistently written by nationalist, colonialist, and orientalist narratives, through essentialist gendered scripts. And just as in the

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[4] This mostly relates to Palestinian women living in Israel. In a statement by Women Human Rights Defenders, in March 2017, such illegal practices and policies were deplored, as they impacted women's participation in civil society and activism inside Israel. The statement points out that "in the case of Palestinian women citizens of Israel, several incidents have been recorded of police officers arresting the fathers of teenage female demonstrators in an attempt to pressure the young women to give up on their protest activities" (Adala 2017).

border spaces occupied by the women in the image above, I consider the metaphorical border spaces that women bloggers open up and the boundaries they disrupt as they write. In so doing, I analyse both the limitations and the possibilities of discourse afforded by an online liminal space.

In her study of Palestine online, Miriyam Aouragh (2012) attempts to answer the question of whether the internet can provide an alternative to a territorially recognised home for a displaced and fragmented nation, through the development of a transnational narrative that reflects Benedict Anderson's (1983) conception of an "imagined community" or nation. My research is also interested in the narratives made possible by the virtual space, especially for a nation that lacks visibility or recognition on the world stage. Aouragh's work has drawn extensively on the virtual domain and argued for its potential to provide ways of reconstructing Palestine online, connecting its transnational and fragmented community, transcending an offline immobile reality, and offering sites of resistance to hegemonic narratives. I expand on her work through an extensive textual analysis of narratives, which aims at examining the ways these online narratives imagine and construct Palestine online and the ways such narratives draw on similar traditional concepts related to women, the nation, and the anticolonial struggle. Research has been carried out in assigning blogs as alternative media, especially in relation to the Palestinian context and to the highly partisan media representations of the conflict (Alfatafta 2011; Caspi and Elias 2011; Najjar 2010). However, rather than dealing with blogs as alternative media (Atton 2002; Baroud 2002; Fadda-Conrey 2010), or citizen journalism or counter-narratives (Najjar 2010; Weirich 2013), I specifically read the blogs analysed in this thesis as forms of online life writing.

Reading through blogs written by Palestinian women, nationalistic themes emerge and readers may generally note the absence of an explicit or direct feminist voice and vision. The blogs might, then, indicate that feminist concerns with women's liberation are often subordinate to a

focus on the national struggle. However, when engaging critically with these blogs, it is difficult to disregard the women's voices, as they protest against the domination of their bodies, time, and space, their attempts to cross borders, and to participate in new forms of storytelling, where they each have the power to claim the subject 'I'.

In summary then, in this thesis, I explore the ways in which Palestinian women bloggers can employ online spaces to voice their gendered identities through online personal accounts, crossing boundaries and articulating a collective oppressive reality. I highlight the emergence of blogs as individual narrative spaces, a "medium of online self-representation" (Bar-Ilan 2005; Hookway 2008) in the Palestinian context, where control over mobility is crippled by the colonial reality. I illustrate how women make informed choices to reflect their location as they negotiate the intersection of complex and competing nationalist, colonialist and orientalist narratives. In the process, I demonstrate the ways in which Palestinian women can transcend colonial as well as literary and patriarchal borders.

Research Background

The rise of the internet in Palestine as a space mediating new forms of narrative has helped create a more global audience, bypassing the restrictions imposed by biased hegemonic media structures. All the developments in relation to the internet and cyberspace have occurred within a highly politicised post-Intifada (Uprising) environment, allowing cyberspace to emerge as a dynamic and a vibrant politico-cultural space for Palestinians. Some Palestinians, whose offline realities are constrained due to the daily practices of an occupation that purposefully fragments every aspect of life, have found—in the relative flexibility of the online space—a means to voice their national aspirations. Traditionally objects of representation by others, Palestinians have used those spaces to speak for themselves.

Women have long been engaged in the conflicting narratives produced on the Palestine–Israel question through their writings, activism and defiance of the dominant hegemony. The national struggle, overseen by a hierarchy of patriarchy dominating conservative Palestinian society, has been disrupted by women's attempts to challenge conventional norms over what and where a woman 'should be' as she participates in that struggle.[5] Throughout Palestine's contemporary history of anticolonial struggle, Palestinian women writers have found in the 'national agenda' a form of protection for their feminist objectives, where their questioning of patriarchal norms could be mediated through this national agenda.[6] Today, a broad diversity of women have established their own individual spaces and their unique voices in cyberspace. In fact, the past decade has witnessed a significant increase in the circulation of internet-based Arab women's writing, especially those written in areas of political turmoil, including Palestine and Iraq. Some of these online accounts have been published as books, including those by Suad Amiry (2005), Riverbend (2005) and Laila El-Haddad (2010).

More broadly, the tense and often ambiguous relationship between feminism and nationalism has been well-documented (Petersen 1984; Minh-ha 1989; Enloe 1992; and Rouhana 2003), and the incompatibility of nationalist and feminist struggles in situations of conflicts has been studied by feminist theorists. Many feminist scholars addressed the question of whether women's rights must be relegated to a second-tier position in nationalist struggles and have highlighted the dual (binary) representation of women in these struggles. For example, in a study on the intersection between gender and nation in Arab women's novels, Lisa Majaj, Paula Sundermen, and Therese Saliba (2002, xxv) explore how "nationalist causes often situate

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[5] For further reading on how the national struggle has shifted gendered roles in Palestinian society, see Bamia (2000); Massad (1995); Peteet (1991). For an exploration of the ways the national struggle has also advanced a feminist consciousness, see Hasso (1998).

[6] See, for example, Fadwa Tuqan (1990); Liana Badr (1990); Sahar Khalifeh (1974, 1980, 1985); Suha Sabbagh (1989). These Palestinian women writers, across the contemporary history of Palestine and its anti-colonial struggle, have grappled with the question of what it means to be a feminist in a time when national consciousness was needed.

women between two extremes, viewing them either as emblems of cultural authenticity locked within traditional roles or as participants in masculinist political struggles—struggles that typically impel women to lay aside female roles in response to nationalist exigencies."

But an analysis of Palestinian women's online discourse has the potential to cast such relationship in a new light. While self-expression and the seizing of individual creative power are not the bloggers' explicitly stated purpose, both are achieved in the blogs, providing deeper insights into the fraught relationship between Palestinian patriotism and feminism and how this might be transformed through non-traditional, contemporary forms of self-expression and narrative. The lives of those women bloggers are subject to colonial and masculinist control, but the narratives they produce in virtual spaces traverses those boundaries in imaginative and inspiring ways. Through a postcolonial feminist lens, I read women's attempts to write their own lives against the restrictive normativity of their socially constructed roles. These factors combine to make women's blogs and the online representation of their lives a rich area of study. In the theoretical framework and analysis of the women's blogs, I have endeavoured to draw extensively on women scholars. Sara Ahmed (2017, 14) argues that "feminism is at stake in how we generate knowledge; in how we write, in who we cite." For Ahmed, citation is "feminist memory." I also cite women bloggers by their first name. Against a cultural practice of shaming calling women by their first names, many women bloggers use their first names as titles to their blogs; I choose to honour such entitlement.

In her discussion of African writing and the writers' attempts at resisting cultural imperialism, Petersen (1984, 235) notes that women's issues are not only ignored, but "conscripted in the service of dignifying the past and restoring African self-confidence." Similarly, Palestinians are engaged in an ongoing cultural struggle that requires positive representations of cultural values. The picture of women's place and role in Palestinian society, some would argue, therefore has

to match and support national aspirations and the quest for liberation from colonial rule.[7]

Women's roles thus still largely conform to a traditional vision of a romanticised national struggle, which sees women as symbolic of the nation itself (Channa 2010; Fayad 1995; Jacoby 1999).

In addition, feminist practices that emerge in anticolonial nationalist struggles can be perceived as a threat to collective identity. Cynthia Enloe (1990) argues that feminism is perceived as radical by creating social stigmas that seem threatening to group identity. Therefore, social reform and the questioning of gender relations in this context might be perceived as divisive, or even treacherous. It is important, then, to explore how the individual feminist voices of Palestinian women are variously articulated in the collective narrative of the nation.

Another challenge that Palestinian women writers in virtual spaces face is the orientalist representation and objectification of Middle Eastern women. In a study of Palestinian women's ability to be agents of change in contrast to the Western feminist tendency to construct Arab women as an undifferentiated group, Nahla Abdo (1995, 141) argues, "Arab/ Muslim women continue to be presented as the imagined objects rather than the real subjects." [8] A construction of women in the Middle East in particular and the Third World in general as the objects of Western imagination has been a problematic aspect of studying feminism in the Third World.[9] This objectification falls

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[7] Women's participation in the national struggle was welcome as long as these women conformed to prescribed roles. For example, based on the national communiques of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising of 1987 (UNLU), Breanne White (2013, 23) observes that "while their role as women and mothers was recognized, the national struggle was held as the ideal, and individual and gendered rights were subverted for the cause of the nation."

[8] In *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to* Odalisque, Mohja Kahf (2010) surveys literary representations of Muslim women in Western discourses from medieval times to the eighteenth century. Kahf (2010, 177) argues that "the dominant narrative of the Muslim women in Western discourse from about the eighteenth century to the present basically states, often in quite sophisticated ways, that the Muslim woman is innately oppressed; it produces Muslim women who affirm this statement by being either submissive nonentities or rebellious renegades—rebellious against their own Islamic world, that is, and conforming to Western gender roles" (2010, 177).

[9] In his defence of Jameson's essay, Lazarus (2011, 106) defines "third-worldness" as a "political desire" and not as a description of a place or region. It is, according to Lazarus, "a regulative ideal born of anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist struggle. It gestures towards a world in which autonomy and popular self-determination will be politically meaningful concepts, in which 'independence' will not correspond merely to 'flag independence.'" Thus, in this thesis, I employ the term third world not in its geographical sense but in the sense proposed by Lazarus: as a political aspiration towards collective self-determination in a world where the nation remains

into Edward Said's vision of the West's persistent will to impose authority and power over the Orient through reproducing and constructing images of women that deny their subjectivity (Said 2003).[10] Thus, women are portrayed as determined, fixed and resistant to change, and they are "either reified out of their socio-temporal context, or are regarded as wholly determined by their cultural and religious traditions" (Jacoby 1999, 152). In fact, the term feminism has long been associated with Western colonialism and has been conflated with calls for Tahrir al-Mara'a, women's liberation (Mohanty 1984; Spivak 1985; Valassopoulos 2008). Thus, feminism has been regarded as a threat to traditional gender roles and customs in the broader Arab society as well as the Palestinian society more specifically.

With this in mind, it is crucial to explore how women bloggers currently relate to this restrictive concept of liberation and also to explore what challenges their writing poses to it. At a time when liberation is largely understood in terms of political self-determination and the nation-state, focus on an online world with few tangible boundaries and the transformed conceptions of community that result is particularly interesting, especially when viewed through a feminist lens. Initially, I began my research by asking why this online medium of expression was barely echoing any feminist discourse. Considering the larger colonial context of women in Palestinian society and the Arab world, the virtual world has allowed for spaces of self-determination that have instigated new modes of self-expression. However, the question remains how often the

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"unforgoable as a site of liberation struggle" (Lazarus, 2011, 106)—as is the case in contemporary Palestine. Tina Sherwell (2003, 126) argues that "if we think of Palestinian nationalism as a Third World anti-colonial struggle, we open up ways of understanding the development of its national discourse and the gendering of the homeland in particular." She explains that the historical conditions from which nations in Africa and the Middle East rose differ significantly from those of the European nations, and that the anti-colonial struggles have had a significant impact on the ways each of these nations recovering from a colonial past or undergoing a colonial present attempted to define their national identity and its distinct character that differentiated it from its colonizers.

[10] Said's *Orientalism* provoked wide critique from scholars such as James Clifford (1980), Albert Hourani (1979), Jalal al-'Azm (2010), Bernard Lewis (1982), and Aijaz Ahmad (1992) for various reasons. For example, in a review published in the New York Review of Books (1979), Hourani wonders whether Said has fallen in the trap he accused orientalists of falling into by generalizing all scholarly texts on the East and Islam as orientalist. In his review, Ahmad (1992) vigorously critiqued Said's failure to appreciate the part played by economic forces in the shaping of British and French imperial history.

awareness of colonial presence in such a context restricts the possibility for narrative and for mobilising the subjective voice. Moreover, as language is also circumscribed by the need for positive cultural representations, it is interesting to consider the ways in which women's blogging replicates or moves away from existing patriarchal nationalist discourse. In a protest over neo-colonial feminism, Palestinian blogger Fidaa Abu Assi (2011) expresses her frustration over an article published on *Mother Jones* in 2010 by journalist Ashley Bates, entitled "Sorry Hamas, I am wearing Blue Jeans". The article discusses the predicament of women in the Gaza Strip ignoring the political context and focusing on the "social images of oppression," including the increase of conservative outfits, the ban on women smoking the hooka in public spaces, and the ban on riding a bicycle. Abu Assi (2011) writes a blog in ventriloquised response to Bates, stating: "'We [Western journalists] are coming to Gaza to liberate the oppressed women,' they keep saying; 'Thank you! but I'm not oppressed,' I keep insisting." However, the attitude towards mainstream narratives that objectify Palestinian women creates not only a defensive reaction from Palestinian women writing for a Western audience, but reinforces existing social codes as the norm and a status quo that cannot be challenged. Abu Assi (2011) writes, "I've grown up in a society where I have to pay much respect to its culture whether I like it or not … The internationals should also realize that they have their own culture." Abu Assi's protest over such orientalist representations of women might have been legitimate and understood; however, the process of writing back to such biased narratives has resulted in a grave misrepresentation of Palestinian women, the complete denial of their oppression caused by prevailing social norms and, worse still, an invitation to preserve those oppressive social norms. "Instead of breaking the social rules, they'd rather work on breaking the world's silence towards the Israeli violations of women's rights inside their prisons" (Abu Assi 2011). In this way, gendered narratives are again posited as being in conflict with the struggle for national liberation.

Despite challenges that women writing in occupied spaces face, as a result of their "concrete situations" (Jameson, 1986), these writers have resisted their fixed depictions in nationalist narratives by various means. In later chapters, I bring the question of nationalism and feminism to blogs as recent forms of narratives that have been made possible through Palestinian women's access to online space, and I read how such narratives might reinforce, complicate or negotiate gendered nationalist narratives in the process.

Selection of Blogs

The primary materials for this research were collected and analysed from a selected sample of Palestinian online blogs. According to Helene Snee (June, 2012), "social researchers have used blogs as a source of data in a variety of ways, from conducting a content analysis of gender and language use to ethnographic participation in blogging communities." The textual analysis of the blog materials selected for this thesis aims to engage deeply with texts, taking an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from feminist, postcolonial and cultural studies. Instead of randomly selecting texts for analysis (as is common in quantitative content analysis), I have selected and presented texts that align with my overall thesis question. This approach corresponds with the objective of my research, which is to read how, and not how often or how much, women's online narratives provided a platform for the exploration of questions of gender and the nation in the Palestinian context.

In the following chapter, I frame blogs, as a genre, as a form of life writing. This has largely directed my selection of the blogs I read in this thesis. The blogs had to be self-referential. Grieve, Biber, Friginal, and Nekrasova (2010) identify two major text-type of blogs: personal and thematic. Both these blog types project "a highly personal and conversational style, which appears to be the standard of the blog." However, thematic blogs, which I have not covered in this thesis, are more focused on impersonal or subject-specific topics. Thematic blogs include

popular subjects such as current events, politics, arts, entertainment, sports and technology; in fact, any topic is permissible. I have also excluded other types of blogs such as filter blogs, which contain a blogger's commentaries on newspaper articles and postings from other websites that are re-published in the blog itself. I have excluded thus blogs with straight-news-style content, book reviews, conference reports and the like. I have also avoided anonymously written blogs, which resulted in my excluding many Arabic blogs, many of which tended to be more anonymous.[11] A feminist reading, as I harness it for my theoretical framework, and according to Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1992, 84), "requires a direct engagement with history." This means that those women whose blogs I explore have taken a position that could pose a threat to them, not only based on their gender but as a result of their engaging in online activities. The bloggers I write about do not hide behind the anonymity allowed by online spaces; rather, they claim that space to voice strong and mostly politically driven stances, and they engage in narratives of the nation as those unfold online.[12] Moreover, the bloggers whose narratives are analysed here have published in many other news websites and media outlets, as well as literary journals, under their real names.

Selecting blogs that fitted this framework was not easy, and sometimes some blogs combined all of these categories, which made it hard to fit them into one category or the other. Early in my research, I planned to organise my analysis into fiction and non-fiction, Arabic and English, home and diasporic narratives. However, these distinctions proved blurry and unhelpful, because in most cases, women cross generic borders producing fiction, nonfiction, literary and non-literary writing simultaneously; they also cross colonial borders returning home, or

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[11] I understand that anonymity may have been a gendered choice, which could have provided women with relative freedom. In her two empirical studies of women's use of the online space, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2010, 2012) highlights women's use of anonymity as a means to avoid being socially harassed.

[12] I choose the word anonymity here cautiously, aware of the recent calls by Helen Kennedy (2014) to develop a less fixed term that can express both *being* anonymous and *feeling* anonymous online. Kennedy suggests "the problem with the concept of anonymity is that it is too fixed and stable to allow for recognition of the differences between *being* anonymous and *feeling* anonymous—Internet identities either are or are not anonymous" (2014, 37; Emphasis in original).

crossing colonial borders to ideas of "home" and also crossing linguistic borders, Arabic, English, and sometimes Hebrew, based on their location.

Being familiar with a few blogs, I used these few as a compass, to direct me to other possibly suitable ones. In most personal blogs, bloggers have a list of suggested websites for readers. The list could come under different titles including "blog roll" or "Blogs I follow." Using this feature, I was able to access more blogs run and developed by Palestinian bloggers, not only in Palestine but also across the Arab region, and the globe. This feature spoke to the transnational and interactive nature of these blogs, for in many ways, they spoke to each other. I ended up closely reading only seven blogs from a list of over thirty.[13]

The selected blogs are all authored by Palestinian women regardless of their age, class, or place of residency. They include those written by female Palestinian bloggers within the borders and in diaspora: from inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), from inside Israel, and from the diaspora. The blogs, hence, cover part of the territorial fragmentation that is an apparent result of the colonial situation in which their narratives are constructed. With the exception of Tamara's blog which is written in Arabic, all other blogs analysed in this thesis were written in English.[14] It is important to note that, due to the lack of editorial revision on those blogs and because, in many instances, English is not the bloggers' first language, the sample blogs might comprise some minor linguistic deficiencies, none of which affect the substantive meaning. All Arabic posts are translated by me.

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[13] Early in my research, I listed all Palestinian women bloggers that I managed to find through online engines. These blogs were my starting point. Through them, I was able to highlight some of the major themes that I discuss in this thesis. In one way or another, these themes resonate in many other blogs written by Palestinian women. However, to be able to engage critically with the texts, I had to limit the number of blogs that I read. Each of these blogs contains numerous blog entries, stretching across years of writing. The earliest blog I found was written in 2002 by blogger Laila El-haddad.

[14] The dominance of English-language media reinforces the dominance of English in the online space. This could also explain the disparity in the number of English and Arabic blog narratives discussed in the thesis.

The Bloggers

Lina Al-Sharif started her blog "Live from Gaza" in 2007. In her first blog, Lina writes that her intention of writing the blog was to show "the real life in Gaza". Using poetry, Lina attempts to translate the distress of her everyday experience of living under siege. However, Lina's personal-political voice moves from covering the situation in Gaza to uncovering the complexities of writing her gendered identity against a set of competing orientalist, colonialist and nationalist discourses. In doing so, Lina's poetry engages directly with the question of women's construction in nationalist narratives, as she creatively protests, refuses and mocks such static representations.

Mariam Barghouti writes a blog that carries her name "Mariam's Blog". In her "About" page, she introduces herself as a Palestinian residing in Ramallah, Palestine and as a graduate in English Literature from Birzeit University. Mariam's blog is a reflection of her activism on the ground. Her blogs are witness narratives of everyday resistance. They are thus born out of the urgency to tell the story of the nation as she witnesses it first-hand. Mariam's narratives are important because they vary between reproducing some highly gendered heroic nationalist images of martyrdom and imprisonment and critiquing this reductive mode of representation. Mariam's blogs unfold the tension that results from women's urgent need to narrate the collective story of the nation and the attempts at deromanticising these gendered prototypes that are highly sanctified in nationalist narratives.

Nour Isdoud is a Palestinian-American blogger. She starts her blog to document her homeward journey back to Palestine. As a second-generation Palestinian exile, Nour's narratives reconstruct Palestine, a place that she previously only knew through the stories of her parents, through her real first encounter with the physical space of her nation. In writing her stories of return, Nour represents the rupture between the image and the reality, but her trips across the

Palestinian landscape end with another rupture which later resonates in her narrative as she starts to question what it means to be "at home."

Rana Baker writes a blog entitled "Palestine: Memory Drafts and Future Alleys". Rana started her blog in 2010 while a university student in Gaza. Between 2010 and 2014, Rana writes extensively on her life as an activist, recalls her war memories, and expresses political dissent from the current Palestinian leadership of the Palestinian Authority. But more importantly, and similar to Nour's exilic narrative, Rana's narratives also aim at redefining her national identity in relation to her contemporary reality of forced immobility imposed by the siege in Gaza. Her narratives are preoccupied with issues of space, borders, and her Palestinian identity.

Reham Alhelsi writes a blog entitled "a Voice from Palestine. Reham's preoccupation with reimaging and reinventing pre-Nakba Palestine through stories connects the images of the past with the images from her contemporary present at the Deheisha refugee camp in the West Bank. In her recreation of these spaces of the past, she articulates her vision of home.

Tamara is a Palestinian and also a citizen in the state of Israel. She writes a very unorthodox blog, which carries her first name. Tamara starts the blog with the intention of becoming a writer, which means that writing her life online mixes both reality and fiction. She employs a playful satiric voice, yet successfully manages, through dramatising her personal life, to draw on questions of readership and representation as they relate to women writing from occupied spaces.

It is important to make very clear that I am not treating the blog samples as representative, but that those I have selected provide the range of approach, focus, style, and texture that allow me to offer the reader insights into the diversity, richness, nuance and flexibility of Palestinian women's blogging practices.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into two key sections. In the first section (consisting of two chapters), I outline the contextual, theoretical and conceptual framework of the thesis; in the second section (consisting of four chapters), I offer close cultural and literary analyses of selected blogs.

Chapter Two accounts for the national, political, and historical context in which women's blogs emerge as a significant narrative and discursive form in contemporary Palestine. I first discuss the significance of online spaces and their relation to offline reality in the Palestinian context after the second Intifada of 2000. I argue that in the Palestinian context, embodied identities and national sentiments extend deeply into the realm of cyberspace, and that virtual reality is by no means disengaged from the socio-political reality of Palestinians (Khalili 2005). I review the limitations of online space discussed by Aouragh (2014) as "cyber colonialism" and Tawil-Souri's (2012) "Digital occupation," yet also discuss the possibilities of Palestinians' virtual presence in relation to their offline fragmented reality. I stress that the internet has provided a space with a transnational possibility for a nation with an absent nation-state, and a contemporary reality of fragmentation, immobility and ongoing colonisation. Despite its limitations, the online environment allows for a public, non-hegemonic discourse to be written and circulated. This discourse presents an important source for examining the making of Palestinian identity, the ways it is constructed online, and the challenges it poses for gendered voices of female bloggers. In the second section of this chapter, I deal with the question of blogs as a form of life writing in order to situate these narratives in a larger body of third world women's voices. I also explore the significance of breaking generic boundaries in order to allow for a serious examination of women's online texts using literary and cultural theory.

In Chapter Three, I offer a detailed overview of the conceptual and theoretical framework that shapes the argument and discussion in this study. I situate my research within a larger contemporary body of research that aims at expanding on Palestine's relation to the field of

postcolonialism. I also explore gender as an important category that has long shaped the construction of Palestine drawing on the works of postcolonial and feminist scholars, including Anna Ball (2012, 2014, 2016) and Anna Bernard (2013). Through a review of Mohanty's critique of *Sisterhood is Global*, which aims at decolonising feminist theory from some of the latter's universalising tendencies, I draw on her reading of feminism as a political stance, and as a politics of engagement. Conceiving of feminism in these ways, that is to say, as a political act, is central to this thesis's reading of blogging itself.

In the second section of my thesis, I move into blog analysis. In Chapter Four, I apply Jameson's concept of national allegories as a way of re-reading gender in nationalist narratives. In considering how women write through critical moments of collective suffering, I look into the ways Palestinian women bloggers negotiate symbolic, idealised, and heroic images of womanhood. As Lina Al-Sharif writes of the rubble caused by the bombs falling on Gaza, and as Mariam Barghouti witnesses first-hand the killing of a protestor friend, both writers recreate images of collective suffering. Yet through these authors' respective poetic narratives, readers can gain insight into how women re-negotiate conventional images of womanhood.

My thesis is largely concerned with concepts of place, constructing 'place' through narratives, narrating a colonised place that is no longer accessible and only imagined through a Palestinian collective memory. In Chapter Five, I draw from blogposts by three Palestinian bloggers situated in various locations to investigate the ways these women construct Palestine through gendered memory. These women produce exilic narratives that problematise nostalgic narratives of a pre-colonial Palestine, and that are characterised by their disconintuity and a disruption in notions of space and time, reflecting more contemporary fragmented exilic realities and identities.

Acts of life writing, such as the blogs considered in this thesis, continuously cross generic borders. Borders, whether physical or metaphorical, occupy a significant space in postcolonial feminist theory. Because of the significance of colonial borders that fragment and fracture Palestinians' everyday reality, many bloggers engage in recreating experiences of border crossing through their online narratives. In Chapter Six, I highlight the violence of the border and the border encounter as it pertains to the Palestinian context. In my reading of these blogs, I discuss how women bloggers use border narrative to negotiate their way across national and colonial boundaries.

In Chapter Seven, the last blog analysed in this thesis, by Tamara Naser is harnessed as a specific example of digression. Tamara's gendered identity takes the lead as readers navigate through her personal life and struggles with writing, readership, and reception. Tamara's blog, her exploration of her sexual identity through the narration of her bodily experiences, her concern with representation, and her use of humour and satire are all boundary-breaking. They provide another layer to the multiplicity of the modes of representation available for women in the online realm.

This thesis opens up the space to explore narratives of ordinary women's resistance through utilising an alternative platform for self-expression. Virginia Woolf (1966) made the point that women's absence from history and its discourse was not a result of women's silence. She tells us that women's history has been "locked in old diaries, stuffed in old drawers" (Woolf 1966, 141). Postcolonial feminist theory's interest in the narratives of the periphery makes it necessary to pay serious attention to the narratives of women who found in the online space an opportunity and a potential to tell their life stories. These narratives provide a fertile space for exploration of how identity can be performed and expressed in the online space; in this thesis, it is the interplay between the gendered and the nationalist identities that I explore. As these women

express their identities online, they convey the power dynamics that restrict and limit their narratives, but in the context of which they make heard their voices of resistance.

Chapter 2.   Why Online?

In order to discuss the significance of the online world in the Palestinian context, it is necessary to reflect on the factors that have shaped Palestinian women's online and offline realities. Questions of space, borders, mobility, narrative, and representation are essential to such discussions because of the possibilities they open up for Palestinian women's online narratives. In fact, the internet has been one of the major developments to have reconfigured the notions of mobility and spatiality. Relative control over space and the ability to escape literal borders and offline limitations is one of the attractions that the virtual world presents to Palestinians in general and women in particular. The territorial and national fragmentation of Palestinians' offline reality is a clear manifestation of their daily experiences under occupation and their subjection to colonialism. Therefore, to discuss the possibilities offered by the online space in the Palestinian context, it is necessary to understand the geographical colonial reality that constitutes Palestinians' everyday experience.

In the first section of this chapter, I introduce the significance of the online virtual space in the Palestinian context as a platform for emerging blog narratives written by Palestinian women. I compare the mobility made possible in the online world with the immobility resulting from offline colonial control. Most importantly, I illuminate the ways in which this environment has allowed for "nationalist" narratives of identity to emerge, where memories are evoked, home is reconstructed and reimagined, and everyday subjective narrative accounts of the conflict become possible. In the second section of the chapter, I locate Palestinian women narratives within a larger body of online life writing. In this section, I discuss blogs as forms of life writing within the context of my interest in the forms of subjectivity and agency emerging through the utilisation of this form of narrative, by those women whose access to traditional forms of writing is doubly hindered. In the Palestinian context, where women are subject to oppressive structures

of patriarchy and colonialism, where silencing takes place as women are spoken for, represented, and turned into symbols, the autobiographical "I" offers access to a politics of self-representation in resistance to both colonial and social oppression. Once we see how these narratives fit into a larger cultural and literary production of women's life writing in Palestine, then we can open up the space for an alternative way of reading these blogs, not merely as new media narratives, but as legitimate individual and public forms of self-expression that provide rich material for cultural analysis.

A Virtual Space Grounded in a Material Colonial Reality

In the last few decades, the internet has facilitated cross-border communication, which has made access to the online world a daily reality for many people across the globe. In an era of globalisation, assumptions about the freedoms promised by deterritorialization and transnational imaginings have taken over (Deleuze and Guattari 1972). With the discovery of the transformative potentials of the internet, earlier postmodern narratives predicted an online utopian global mobility. Within such a context, the idea of the nation-state has been critiqued and even undermined in contrast to the freedoms provided by the virtual world, where it is argued that "our rootedness to place has attenuated" (Turkle 2011, 178). Within such postmodern redefinitions of identity and mobility, especially with their undermining of the concept of territory in their aspirations towards borderless spaces and free movement across borders,[1] collective identities including national ones have, in effect, been called into question.

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[1] Sherry Turkle (2011) argues that online, identities change and become more fluid and fragmented. Kennedy (2014, 30) refers to the "fluidity and fragmentation that Turkle claims for Internet identities" as also characterising a broader range of literature on postmodern identity in general which celebrates "fragmented, fluid postmodern identities" and their realisation online. In theorising postmodern subjectivities, Rosi Braidotti (1994, 22) employs the concept of "nomadic subjects." The nomad is postmodern because s/he "has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia to fixity." Braidotti's work draws on Giles Deleuze (1973) and his rejection of the concept of identity, as the concept of identity is one that "implies stability and stasis, whereas what really offers creative and theoretical potential is difference—not being (as implied in the term 'identity') but becoming" (Kennedy 2014, 31). It is important to note that Braidotti (1994) was taking Deleuze and Guattari's work and expanding on it for western feminism (before the internet explosion). Thus, the work was important at the time and in the specific theoretical political and critical context and reason for which it was written.

Various studies of cyberspace and cyberculture have focused on the "ability to switch identities in cyberspace, the ease of border crossing, and the decentring of information flows," thus highlighting "the possible instabilities and fluidity of identities and cultural boundaries online" (Khalili 2005, 126). The emergence of the virtual world as a timeless "deterritorialized" space has often led its positioning as either in parallel with or outside of the realm of the offline. However, accounts celebrating transnational imaginings have often disregarded the fact that the experience of "easy" border crossing is largely determined by acquiring the privileges of citizenship (Khalili 2005, 144). The idea that we all belong to a certain territory or to certain sovereign states, with a passport that facilitates mobility across borders, has created the illusion of a global transnational community. This, of course, elides the real, material differences between people in terms of their power, privilege, and freedom to move. The experience of an American or Australian citizen with a US or an Australian passport who can move around the world with few obstacles is different from the experience of a Palestinian stateless person or refugee who is not even entitled to a passport enabling such movement. The celebrated "'mobility turn' offers many reflections about (transnational) mobility or migration in (or to) the Western world but little about immobility in a context of colonial conflict and statelessness" (Aouragh 2011, 376).[2]

These historical and colonial realities must be considered as we discuss the virtual space, where real disparities of power do not simply disappear, but are daily negotiated. Laleh Khalili (2005,

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[2] In her article "Home and Away" Sara Ahmed (1999) criticises accounts of transnationalism, deterritorialization, globalisation, the celebration of the diasporic figure, and the figure of the nomad and the emphasis on "placeless" identity—identities not bound to culture or to geography. Ahmed sees the celebration of such identities as related to the concept of the "Western Self" which "already has a place in the world", and thus can afford contemplating the possibilities of deterritorialization. Watson and Smith (2014, 82) also comment on this global circuit in relation to internet access as follows: "Access to online technologies remains unevenly distributed across the globe. Moreover, the asymmetrical distribution of access and benefits; the differential treatment of the labor forces producing hardware, software, and cloudware; the differential degrees of technical literacy; the incommensurability of culturally specific idioms of self-presentation; and the persistence of larger formations of imperialism and neocolonialism all impact the lived realities of the digital divide and the digital future."

143) concludes her study on Palestinian internet use in the refugee camps in Lebanon arguing that:

> celebrations of deterritorialization in cyberspace have tended to ignore the problem that to become deterritorialized one has to have a territory and a homeland in the first place, and to forsake one's identity for the fluidities of diasporic or liminal identity play, one has to be able to claim an identity not only in political contestations but also in something as mundane as a passport.

Palestinians' daily reality lacks this sense of "fluidity" and the "free flow of space", which are assumed to be the pervasive condition of contemporary globalisation. In a context where mobility is controlled and decided on by dominant powers, mobility should not be dealt with as a given (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006). "Mobilities" argues Miriyam Aouragh (2011, 382) "are … implicated in the production of power relations". Therefore, it is important to note that any discussion of the internet and the possibility it offers for narratives of identity to emerge in the Palestinian context cannot be had without reference to the embodied spatial experiences of Palestinians on the ground.[3] Rather than focusing on the technological determinist perspectives that posit a "dystopian" vision of the internet as a threatening dehumanising alienating space or a "utopian" vision promising "ecstatic postcorporeal liberties" (Khalili 2005, 127), my research aims at investigating the political, cultural, and literary possibilities of narratives emerging online, in relation to the territorial, political context of Palestine. In this sense, I agree with Khalili's observation that "embodied identities, territorialized spaces, and real-world institutions extend deeply into the realm of cyberspace, and that Palestinian virtual culture has nonvirtual social roots and histories" (2005, 126). In the context of Palestine, Khalili (2005,

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[3] Similarly and more generally, Kennedy (2014, 26) argues that "online identities are often continuous with offline selves, not reconfigured versions of subjectivities IRL; for this reason it is necessary to go beyond Internet identities, to look at offline contexts of online selves, in order to fully comprehend virtual life."

126) argues, "nonvirtual identities and national imaginaries still shape and transform daily practices and social relations in both the real and cyber worlds."[4] Khalili and Aouragh's emphasis on how virtual identities are inextricably bound to the Palestinian national question establishes the fact that women have to negotiate such highly nationalist imaginings and their gendered implications as they write online.

Mobility as a direct effect of the internet's relative flow of space is closely related to concepts of transnationalism. However, rather than achieving the effect of a post-nation-state placeless-ness, internet spaces in the Palestinian context feed into the offline feelings of belonging to a place and the need for it. It is true that "online spaces indeed challenge classic definition of place as bounded physical location and necessitate new theoretical constructs that account for unbounded communities and spaces online" (Zook 2006, 56 cited in Aouragh 2012, 45). Therefore, it is important to note that I do not wish to argue that online spaces function as an alternative to the actual territorial place that is Palestine, nor do these "placeless spaces" aim to *replace* homeland. I argue, instead, that in such a context of fragmentation, blogs provide displaced Palestinians with a means of forging alternative modes of belonging and of constructing previously silenced narrative expressions of national identity, which reconstruct and imagine the lost, deterritorialized home.

Therefore, in order to understand how the online space has provided Palestinians with a relatively open space, a sense of mobility and the opportunity to connect with its diasporic community, it is important to reflect briefly on the offline Palestinian reality. It is this reality

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[4] In referring to "virtual escapism" in the Palestinian context, Aouragh (2012, 102) stresses that such escapism does not refer to a "narrow dystopian sense," because of the double-edged nature of Palestinian internet use. Palestinians, especially those living in exile, often use the internet to escape everyday harsh realities, to imagine alternative realities, and to fulfil a nostalgia for Palestine. But this also comes with the risk of alienation due to unfulfilled outcomes. However, this form of escapism is political and is grounded in offline political reality. "Virtual mobility," argues Aouragh (2012, 106), "with all its pros, cons and uncertainties, is another way of coping with the offline reality characterised by immobility."

that has motivated resistance in the online realm to a long colonial history of immobility, forced mobility, and fragmentation.

A Deterritorialized Palestine: The Geography of Nowhere

Failing to enter her passport details at the British Airways website because Palestine, her country of residence, did not appear in the country listing, blogger Laila El-Haddad (December, 2011) wrote in a blogpost entitled "I Complain, therefore, I am":

> I'm fairly certain I exist. Descartes tells me so, and before him, Ibn Sina. And when my son drags me out of bed to play with him in the pre-dawn hours, I really know I do. So you can imagine how distraught I was when my existence was cast into serious doubt by a major airline. … Now, I understand "Palestine" does not exist on any western maps, so I would have settled for Palestinian territories (though Palestinian bantustans may be more appropriate), Gaza Strip and West Bank or even Palestinian Authority, as my "pursuant to the Oslo accord"-issued passport states. But none of these options existed. And neither, it seemed, did I.

Laila's encounter with this non-recognition of Palestine as either a country or a state, resulting in its absence in many official country listings is one of the manifestations of the geographical, political and virtual "nowhere of Palestine" (Williams and Ball 2014, 127).[5] Said argues that, "perhaps the greatest battle Palestinians have waged as a people has been over the right to a

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[5] Materializing Palestine as a territorial entity, both in virtual and non-virtual reality, has been problematic for many Israeli officials. Tawil-Souri and Aouragh (2014) go as far as arguing that this virtual existence goes against Israel's ideology. For example, in 1998, Ariel Sharon, then the Israeli Foreign Minister, personally lobbied the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) against its decision to offer Palestinians an international telephone code, claiming that Palestine is "not a territorial or geographical entity" (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh 2014, 102). Besides, after Google changed its reference to Palestine from "Palestinian Authority" to "Palestine", on 2 May 2013, in response to a similar recognition by some UN international organizations, Google received many letters from Israeli officials demanding a reconsideration of the decision to the name "Palestine" on its drive, which amounted to recognising Palestine in the virtual realm. (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh 2014, 102).

remembered presence, and with that presence, the right to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality" (1999, 12). The geographical materiality of Palestine has been persistently diminished by the colonial confiscation of Palestinian land. 'Another dunum, another goat' was the adage of Zionist settlers under the government of Chaim Weizmann, during which the small-scale dispossession of land was an ongoing policy aimed at the erosion of Palestinian existence. Politically, 'the question of Palestine' appears to be nowhere. The peace process in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords (1993) has failed the essential objective of achieving the two-state solution, leading to the ongoing non-existence of Palestine as a nation-state. In fact, throughout modern history, Palestine has been under the control and domination of several powers, which has meant the constant shifting of its geographical boundaries.[6] The present reality inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) is further fractured due to the daily practices of the occupation.[7] The continuous annexation of lands from the West Bank has been another manifestation of the policies that have diminished the geographical existence of Palestine. Settlement expansion has meant increasing the number of Israeli-only road networks and buffer zones. In addition, the ongoing building of the Separation wall by Israel, purportedly established for security reasons, resulted in the annexation of 1967 Palestinian land, and is further manifestation of a fragmented Palestinian offline reality.[8] The separation wall has led to

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[6] One of the most important determinants of contemporary borders in the Middle East was shaped in the early twentieth century with the fall of the Ottoman Empire. As a result of the secret negotiations between France and Britain that led to dividing the ex-Ottoman empire and establishing nation-states (known as the Sykes-Picot agreement), Palestine was placed under British mandate between 1922 and 1948 (Yuval Davis and Stoetzler 2002, 333). In 1947, UN Resolution 181 divided the territory and established the first UN-suggested borderline to the state of Israel and to Palestinian territories assigning the minority Jewish population 57% of the land. The act of dividing the territory by drawing shifting borderlines as a result of the shifting power dynamic that followed the events of the Nakba of 1948, continued throughout Palestine's contemporary history of colonization. Most significantly was the demarcation of the "green line" in 1949, which drew the initial borderlines of Israel till 1967. The war of 1967 left all Palestine under the control of the Israeli state; subsequently, in 1993, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was assigned self-governance of Gaza and the West Bank after the Oslo Accords; both territories were controlled by Israeli checkpoints and movement from and to Israel was restricted. The territorialisation of the PA since the Oslo Accords has rather led to a further fragmentation and another layer of internal politics of repression.
[7] Territories occupied in the conflict of 1967 were internationally recognised as occupied. UN resolution 242 issued on 22nd November 1967 demanded the withdrawal of Israel armed forces from these territories.
[8] Aouragh (2011, 378) explains that the wall has come to symbolise the combination of immobility and urbicide as it penetrates through thousands of kilometres of Palestinian cities, agricultural lands, which has been farmed for

the ghettoization of many Palestinian cities and villages preventing the possibility of establishing a viable state. The wall functions not only as an ethnic separation line singling out those of different ethnicity or different religion but it also disconnects the Palestinian people from the outside world, trapping them in isolated Bantustans. Such acts of containment, which resulted in the paralysing of Palestinian life and movement, have been frequently re-imposed since the emergence of the first Intifada. In the Gaza Strip, despite the Israeli military disengagement and the dismantling of Israeli settlements that took place in 2005, Israel preserved its control through air, sea and borders. Israel's paramount control over the movement of Palestinians within the borders of the Gaza Strip has created the world's largest open-air prison (Chomsky 2012).[9] Aouragh (2011, 376) notes that the Israeli colonial project in Palestine is one of a double occupation: "an occupying military force and a colonial-settler presence – now solidified with a snake-shaped wall penetrating deep into the occupied Palestinian territories." The forcibly fractured nature of the current Palestinian geographic reality and its disastrous outcomes for both Palestinians and Israelis have even been criticised by few Israeli journalists, notably Hass (2005, para 7), who comments that:

> Through the checkpoints, road closures, movement ban, and traffic restrictions,
> through the concrete walls and barbed wire fences, through the land
> expropriations (solely for the purpose of security, as the High Court of Justice,
> which is part and parcel of the Israeli people, likes to believe), through the
> disconnecting of villages from their lands and from a connecting road, through
> the construction of a wall in a residential neighborhood and in the backyards of

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centuries. However, it also became a symbol of articulating resistance to the occupation in the "West Bank" through visuals such as graffiti and cartoons.

[9] In a speech entitled "Democracy, Mobility and Circulation in a Planetary Age - An Ethics of Consequences", Achille Mbembe (2018) uses Gaza as an example of the "culmination of exclusionary spaces." Mbembe names today's world as a "time of planetary entanglement", characterised by fast capitalism and intensified connections as a result of an everyday access to computation technology. But he also argues that it is a time of "contraction, containment, and inclusion". Mbembe thus describes Gaza as a prototype to exclusionary places used as prison and incarceration spaces to these human bodies who are considered "unwanted, illegal, or superfluous".

homes, and through the transformation of the West Bank into a cluster of "territorial cells," in the military jargon, between the expanding settlements – we Israelis have created and continue to create an economic, social, emotional, employment and environmental crisis on the scale of a never-ending tsunami.[10]

Space is a significant dimension of the conflict "wherein spatiality has become the product of politics and the material theatre of war" (Tawil-Souri 2011, 13). Building on Foucault's argument that space is essential in any exercise of power (1986), Helga Tawil-Souri (2011, 13) asserts that "the Palestinian landscape is used as a playground and laboratory by the Israeli state/military to exert power, create new modes of organisation, parcel out and govern territories and people in ways heretofore undreamed of".[11] These restrictions imposed over territorial offline spaces have shaped the colonial subjugation of the Palestinian people, clearly exposing existing power relations. Such colonial forms of spatial control permeate the Palestinians' landscape serving as apparatus of immobility where the indigenous population's mobility is not only restricted, but also regulated and policed.

The historical genesis of forced mobility and forced immobility began in 1948, the year known in Palestinian collective memory as the Nakba, "the Catastrophe."[12] This was considered one of the largest forced displacement in modern history with the territorial dispersion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes and villages to exile (Pappe 2007). The two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, have perceived the interpretation of this same historical event

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[10] Aouragh (2011, 376) argues that "closure, as the general movement restriction in Palestine, is applied indiscriminately to the whole population. Though a reality since 1948, the practice dramatically increased since the 1991 Gulf War—turning into a lengthy collective punishment—and was finally formalised after the Oslo 'peace' Accords of 1993."

[11] The idea of policing people and controlling their movement has been a policy since 1967 right after Israel started a population registry which excluded a large number of Palestinians who did not reside in Palestine at the time, and produced a complex ID card systems, which was later coded with colours, dependent on location.

[12] The term "Nakba" or catastrophe was not always the way this year was marked by Palestinians. Early accounts of this mass forced mobility included terms such as "sanat alhijra" (the year of migration), and had originally had a double connotation and religious symbolic significance, because it referred to Prophet Mohammed's Hijra, which eventually ended in a victorious return. However, with the passing years, the term Nakba with its catastrophic connotation began to take over (Sayigh 2007).

differently. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948, which affirmed the national aspirations of the Jewish people, came at the expense of Palestinians, whose desire for self-determination and territorial sovereignty remains largely unfulfilled (Abu-Lughod 1982, Said 1980). Chatty (2005, 15) explains that:

> For the Zionists, it was the culmination of the dream of creating a state for world Jewry, as a means to put an end to European anti-Semitism; for Palestinians it was the time of expulsion and destruction of their land and society.

For Israelis and many Jews around the world, 1948 signified the anniversary of the establishment and independence of the state of Israel, narrating "a miraculous story of recovery after the Holocaust, of democracy, of making the desert bloom" Said (2000, 183). For the Palestinians, on the other hand, the year saw the dispersion of around 750,000 Palestinians who fled their homes, farms and businesses in Palestine. Around 160,000 others remained in the land designed by the UN as the Jewish state, constituting the Palestinian minority in Israel (Pappe 2007, 138).[13] However, the destruction and the mass forced migration resulting from this event was overshadowed by the narrative of the "birth or rebirth" of the Israeli state. The dialectic of death-rebirth, "a philosophical conception with enormous purchase in religious and secular Western thought, applied to Jewish people", (Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007) accompanied the establishment of the state of Israel. The 1948 war thus revitalised a discourse of rebirth of the Jewish people in the aftermath of the Nazi genocide.

Consequently, the term "mobility" for Palestinians is often connected to their experiences of involuntary exile and diaspora. The Palestinian nation has since been characterised by

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[13] These are approximate figures and they are contested. According to Sa'di and Abu-Lughod (2007, 23) the numbers could be much higher based on demographic analysis of British census and projections. They estimate that around 80 percent of the Palestinians residing in "77 percent" of Palestinian territory where Israel was established in 1948 became refugees.

dispersion and fragmentation, as three-quarters of its population has been deemed refugees.[14]

Given such contestation over territory and borders, Palestine in this research refers to the Palestine as defined in the collective memory of most Palestinians, whether residing within its borders or outside; it is the Pre-Nakba Palestine, the historic Palestine, Mandate Palestine or what most Palestinians simply call "48 Palestine". Given this fluid idea of the Palestinian nation, the duality of the online–offline relationship is also contestable and problematised by some important factors.

The Online–Offline Nexus

Whether the online space has provided Palestinians with freedoms that the above-mentioned offline limitations and immobility fail to offer is contested. Scholars such as Helga Tawil-Souri (2012), Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2010, 2012) and Sarah Weirich (2013), for example, suggest that any significant role the internet as a space could play in facilitating Palestinian agency is undermined given practices of surveillance, censorship, and infrastructure ownership. Yet, others have stressed the importance of these spaces (Aouragh 2012; Najjar 2010; Nashif 2016) as opportunities for political agency otherwise denied in spaces of conflict, as counter-narratives, as transnational opportunity, and as spaces of resistance.

The following is a review of some of the major studies that have shaped discussions around the restrictions and possibilities of online platforms as these relate to the Palestinian reality. These studies, which also outline some of the limitations of the online space, do not, I suggest, contradict the premise of my argument, nor do they undermine the significance of the internet as it relates to the Palestinian context. Rather, they challenge the binaristic thinking that might

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[14] The term refugee is not an essentialised fixed term, but an entity with multiple dimensions and experiences resulting from occupying different geographical locations.

shape our understanding of the online world by demonstrating that this space is neither entirely liberating nor completely restrictive.[15]

Digital Occupation

Israeli control of internet infrastructure is another form of occupation and surveillance that internet users in Palestine face. Tawil-Souri's (2012) research, which aimed to investigate this form of occupation—occupation which does not take an explicitly military shape—refers to Israel's control over the telecommunication sector in the Gaza Strip as "digital occupation". While Israel continues to argue that its occupation of the Gaza Strip ended with its unilateral withdrawal of its settlers in 2005, the reality on the ground shows otherwise. Israel still occupies the Gaza Strip indirectly, which means that while its illegal settlers and military infrastructure were removed, it has maintained its effective control over the territory's air space, territorial waters, electromagnetic sphere, population registry and movement of all goods and people through its checkpoints. Tawil-Souri (2012) explains that Israel's continuous control over the telecommunication sector, including landlines, cellular, and internet infrastructure has technologised occupation and created a form of "digital occupation." This has made of Gaza an "airborne-occupied enclave" as its space as well as its civilian population have, since 2005, been attacked and oppressed through further technologised control (Tawil-Souri 2012, 27). Tawil-Souri views the management and continued control of this dense technological infrastructure in Gaza as spaces of control; thus, these spaces are limited by Israeli policies, especially with internet traffic being routed through switches situated outside the Gaza Strip inside Israeli-controlled territories.[16]

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[15] The idea of the internet as a public and a democratic space, in general, has lately been disrupted by its commodification as a site for the collection of consumers' data, as well as its use for surveillance practices. For example, Anna Poletti and Julie Rak (2014, 79) argue that "online environments are fully corporatized, with sites ripe for data mining by aggregators and marketers."

[16] It is significant to mention that the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, in a US congressional delegation on 28 April 2009 explained his vision of a future Palestinian state declaring that "a Palestinian state must be

Tawil-Souri and Aouragh (2014) discuss the possibility of political resistance and activism in the online space by referring to the restrictions caused by both infrastructural and territorial limitations as well as the neoliberal privatised monopoly over Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) under the Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership as "cyber colonisation." In general, though telecommunication infrastructure was handed to a Palestinian private sector in 1995 (the Palestinian telecommunication company PalTel), Israel still allocates frequencies and controls where new infrastructure can be built, as determined by the Oslo Accords. This infrastructure, for example, could not be installed along the Israeli-defined buffer zones, or along the separation wall. Thus, all international traffic, including later internet connections and lines had to be routed through Israeli providers, and PalTel had to pay connection and termination fees, and was prohibited from having its own international gateway. There has also been a restriction on the import of ICT equipment needed to expand networks (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh 2014, 112). Tawil-Souri and Aouragh's study lists the limitations caused by Israel's imposed constraints and the monopoly over internet provision by PalTel and its internet service provider (ISP) company Hadara. However, despite these constraints and limitations to the ICT sector in Palestine caused by offline territorial control, both scholars admit that "the hegemonic appeal of a limitless and deterritorialized internet has not diminished" (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh 2014, 115). Although Tawil-Souri's (2012) study presents some of the challenges faced by Palestinian bloggers online, including matters relating to the ownership of internet infrastructure and censorship, it does not reflect on the agency that Palestinians themselves might assert in those spaces. The later study by Tawil-Souri and Aouragh (2014) actually acknowledges that the assumption that online spaces have not provided a space of freedom otherwise denied offline contradicts the reality on the ground. Statistics have shown that for a long time, and certainly until the Arab uprisings in 2011, Palestinian internet usage has been

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demilitarised, without control of its airspace and electro-magnetic field, and without the power to enter into treaties or control its border" (Fisk, 2010).

substantially higher than elsewhere in the Arab world. Some have argued that Gaza has the largest number of Facebook users per capita in the world, which indicates a correlation between political resistance, immobility, and internet growth (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh 2014, 107). In fact, despite the decrease of the average income of Palestinian households within the occupied Palestinian Territories since the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada in September 2000, there has been a significant growth in the number of Palestinian internet users, particularly women.[17] This growth reflects the high proportion of young people connecting to networks at home, schools, universities, and youth centres (Khoury-Machoul 2007, 18). This growth in access to and use of the internet by Palestinians is an indication of the burgeoning of this mode of communication, whereby the fragmented lives of Palestinians offline can be, in some senses, connected. In fact, the use of internet platforms as spaces of resistance has led to Israel's implementation of new measures that criminalises social media use. Hundreds of Palestinians have been arrested as a result of online posts on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Blogs (Santos 2018, 2016; Nashif 2016).[18] The introduction of such laws, threatening Palestinians' use of these platforms, attests to the significance of these platforms as sites of resistance for Palestinians. Tawil-Souri and Aouragh (2014, 128) conclude their research with the following:

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[17] According to the 2017 annual report of the Arab Center for Advancement of Social Media (7amleh), in 2016, 65 percent of Palestinians in Israel were internet users; the survey specifically included those aged over 20 years. Besides, in 2017, there were 3,018,770 internet users in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which amounts to 60.5 percent of the population. As stated in 7amleh's (2018, 34) report on *Internet Freedoms in Palestine*, "Mapping of Digital Rights Violations and Threats", the internet access gap between Palestinian women and men is receding when comparing the results of 2014 to 2000. The percentage of Palestinian female internet users increased from 2.8 % to 47.5%, compared to 7.9% to 59.6% among their male counterparts.

[18] According to a recent report on internet freedoms in Palestine published by the Arab Center for Advancement of Social Media, internet freedoms for Palestinian residing in Israel and the Palestinian Territories "have been deteriorating in the past two years at a concerning speed." Government crackdown—the Israeli government as well as the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas governments in the Palestinian territories—on freedom of expression and political dissent is a challenge Palestinians in Israel and in the Territories face. For example, according to Adala (2017), between the years 2015 and 2016, there have been over 400 'Facebook arrests' by Israeli authorities. In June 2017, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas signed a presidential decree to enforce "the Electronic Crimes Law" under the claim of fighting cybercrime. The law was deplored by many civil society organisations, journalists and activists who saw the law as a violation of Palestinian Basic Law. Human rights organisations in Gaza have reported numerous cases of arrest, interrogation, abductions and even torture of Palestinian journalists and activists by the Hamas authorities because of their online activities and their online expression of dissent (7amleh 2018).

Taken together with other practices, internet practices widen the space for subversive manoeuvring. Internet resistance allows Palestinians to voice their claims, to perpetuate their history, to mobilize and to help construct or reconnect Palestinian narratives. "Palestine" is also a virtual space through which individuals imagine, maintain, and negotiate a nation and a state. While the internet affords empowering spaces and can be significant for grassroots activism, the disempowering materiality of technology shapes that very activism.

Aouragh's extensive study of Palestinians' use of online spaces reiterates the significance of the internet in shaping nationalist narratives as Palestinians attempt to imagine and construct the nation online. Her work, however, does not provide an analysis of such nationalist narratives nor does it discuss their gendered implications, an intervention which this thesis undertakes.

Cyber Intifada

As mentioned above, this research builds on Aouragh's argument that the internet is also a space for resistance as it allows for Palestinian narratives to emerge. Aouragh (2008b) insists on connecting both offline restrictions—and the political activism and resistance those restrictions provoke—and online possibilities as "new forms of social movements". In her discussion of the possibility of using the internet as a space of resistance to the hegemonic narrative, she (2008b) outlines two different approaches. The first is a *utopian* view, which considers internet activity as activism or resistance and allows for a space of power and agency. However, this utopian approach to cyber-activism "might lead to overstating the potential of the internet", Aouragh (2008b: 120) argues. The second is a *dystopian* view, which is sceptical about the potential of any successful political engagement on the internet. The dystopian view sees any activities in terms of the overarching control of service providers and American

corporations such as Yahoo and Microsoft, all of which have power over the websites and the mailing lists each of the political activists is using. However, this radical view might eliminate any potential for internet spaces to be spaces of agency. Aouragh (2008b) adds that it makes of the notion of resistance an illusion, as all internet users, including activists, are then regarded as co-opted by the system/power. These binaristic technologically determinist approaches to cyberspace risk either dismissing any agency exercised by users in the online space or expecting of this space a potential beyond what it can actually realise: that is, assigning it some unrealistic powers as a technology promising political liberation. In fact, the possibilities of the internet are, rather, the result of "human decisions and practices, themselves based on historical conditions" (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh 2014, 104). Therefore, recalling Michel De Certeau's position on the dynamic relation between elites and non-elites where the oppressed are in possession of the means to resist "hegemonic representations and oppression", Aouragh (2008b, 110) ultimately views the internet as a tactical political tool and as a part of everyday life practices, which presents a counter to the hegemonic media: a practice that Aouragh calls "Cyber Intifada". Several tools have been invested in this space of resistance, of which blogs constitute a significant component. In this sense, Aouragh (2008b, 110) states that "the internet could help defy the repression of everyday life in Palestine by overcoming the limitations of checkpoints and occupation and thus generate feelings of 'mobility' and 'political autonomy.'" Thus, extending Aouragh's position, I argue that although the internet might not become the accessible space that completely undermines the limitations of offline reality, it does constitute a relatively free space that allows for public non-hegemonic discourses to be written. But rather than merely producing counter-narratives, I claim that the internet provides a forum that allows for Palestinian nationalist narratives to be written. Khalili (2005, 127) states that:

> For these young people, the internet further distributes odes of nationalist
> understanding, using images and leaflets, across borders. Far from destabilizing

national identifiers, their virtual practices, whether quotidian or contentious, animate their "long distance nationalism." National-political identity influences most facets of their online interactions and even affects domains of romance and play that are ostensibly separate from nationalist politics. Nationalist tropes of martyrdom and of the anthropomorphised nation are prevalent in virtual artefacts, and references to concrete Palestinian spaces, landscapes and geographies are common in the ephemeral and deterritorialized space of the internet.

It is important to locate women's online blogs within this nationalist online context and to relate these to the larger colonial reality. The mobility that blogs specifically have enabled can thus be understood as the toggling between the online and the offline worlds, the subjective 'I' of the blogger and the nationalist struggle of the collective, the movement between exile and home, in and outside of borders, and between the real and the literary. Situating women's online narratives within such a larger framework of Palestinian online activity is thus crucial to understanding its relation to concepts of resistance and mobility. Blogs, particularly, have provided platforms for viable means of online life writing for Palestinian women.

The Digital Autobiography of the Everyday

In this section, I assert blogs as "a viable and expanding format for personal life-writing" (Hayton 2009, 199).[19] By life writing, I refer to Smith and Watson's definition, one that is "inclusive of the heterogeneity of self-referential practices" (2010, 4). Life writing is "a general term for writing that takes a life, one's own or another's, as its subject. Such writing can be

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[19] There has been an increasing body of research on blogging and its rise as a tool for the 'presentation of self in everyday life' (Goffman: 1959). There is a considerable literature on discussions about the history of the creation and development of webblogs (Kim 2005; Miles 2005). There have also been discussions about blogging in terms of gender (Watt 2006; Miller and Arnold 2000).

biographical, novelistic, historical, or explicitly self-referential and therefore autobiographical"

(Smith and Watson 2010, 4). I also use the adjective 'autobiographical' to imply 'self-referential writing', and not in reference to the 'traditional Western mode' of autobiography. In fact, I deliberately avoid using the term autobiography because of the dominant understanding of its nature as a canonical genre that "privileges one particular way of writing a life, a way that for many critics is simultaneously too abstract, too masculine, and Western" (Huddart 2008, 2).[20] Therefore, I deal with online life writing as an extension of offline life writing, a genre that can incorporate limitless variations and 'outlaws.'

The emergence of new online formations of subjectivity, such as blogs, as a result of now omnipresent global communication systems have necessitated a broadening of the limits and uses of autobiographical forms to incorporate emerging forms of self-representation and narration. The internet thus allows for a space "where the traditions of conventional autobiography can exist alongside more permeable but equally valid life-writing without being harnessed in hard copy by print publishers" (Hayton 2009, 199).

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[20] Recent scholarly work on traditional autobiography has attempted to decolonise its Western history and Eurocentric practices and theorization in order to encapsulate the diversity of the forms and the locales from which such writings emerge (Smith and Watson amongst others). This has mainly been carried out through the exploration of the uses of life writing by those whose lives have been defined by the systematic oppression of colonialism, race, class or gender. Smith and Watson (1992) argue that as a Western post-Enlightenment term and practice, autobiography "invoke[s] a particular genealogy, resonant ideology, and discursive imperative. Powering and defining centers, margins, boundaries, and grounds of action in the West, traditional "autobiography" has been implicated in a specific notion of "selfhood." This autobiographical "I" emphasises the individual and his uniqueness, but this "I" imposing its human universality is that of the privileged Man, "whose essence remains outside the barriers of history." Within this exclusive notion of selfhood, not all "I"s are unique nor individual as colonised subjectivity has always been reduced to its "anonymous, opaque collectivity of undifferentiated bodies." Memmi (2003, 129) terms this tendency as "the mark of the plural", for the singular and the personal have no space in the colonial narrative where the colonised "does not exist as an individual." This essentialization of the heterogeneous others makes no room for the privatization of this "I." Smith & Watson (1992, 82) argue that "where Western eyes see Man as a unique individual rather than a member of a collectivity, of race or nation, of sex or sexual preference, Western eyes see the colonized as an amorphous, generalized collectivity."

Blogs as a Form of Life Writing

There is a significant body of scholarly research on the nature of blogs as a form or a genre.[21] For, example weblogs have been perceived as a development of the handwritten paper diary. In attempting to fit weblogs into existing traditional forms such as paper diaries by means of comparison, there have been many debates on the similarities and differences between this newly emerging form and the more traditional forms of autobiographical writing. For example, Kitzmann (2003, 63) concludes his study on the differences between conventional handwritten diaries and the online diaries that were increasingly appearing at the turn of the twenty-first century arguing that online diary writing completely differs from traditional handwritten diaries as the media changes the message. [22] Thus, an important aspect of the differences between such modes of writing lies in the experimental and material conditions of the online realm itself.[23] In an article on weblog and internet queer identity, Julie Rak (2005) points out that researchers' attempts to compare electronic forms of writing with non-electronic ones is an example of Jacques Derrida's position on genre, that a genre "is made thinkable by means of a law which simultaneously marks the limit of inside and outside, even as the excesses of the law demonstrate the impossibility of setting such a limit." (Rak, 2005, 59–60). However, I do not compare blogs to other conventional forms of self-expression by asking whether blogs fit within

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[21] Whereas the term weblog came into use in 1997, blogging software became available in 1999 (Blood 2002). Earlier versions of weblogs called "media filter" blogs focused on the exposition of web links and thoughts and reflections about current affairs (Rak 2005). However, around 1999, weblogs started to be more individually-oriented and to focus on personal experiences.

[22] Automediality is a term developed by scholars of life writing including Jörg Dünne and Christian Moser, among others. The term emphasises that the choice of the medium is constitutive of the subjectivity expressed in life narratives, especially those which use new media (Smith and Watson 2010, 168). Automediality has led to an "interdisciplinary expansion of narratology across the humanities." This meant that more recent forms of stories, which harness the rapid development of new technologies, have been also examined as narratives: from cinematic film, to stories that depend on image such as cartoons, music and more recently, digital stories. In this thesis, my reading of the blogs, however, does not consider automediality and the different media that online bloggers use for self-representation. Rather, I have focused on written form, not images, videos, or other media.

[23] Whitlock (2006, 32) argues that the internet itself as the medium through which the autobiographical subject speaks has its own distinct features, which eventually invoke "different styles of autobiographical performance and self-constitution." Such features include, for example, "the facilitation of many-to-many communications; the simultaneous reception, alteration, and redistribution of cultural objects; the dislocation of communication from territorialized spatial relations; and the instantaneous global contact and networking in real time" (32).

the limits and borders of specific life-writing practices, whether handwritten diaries, conventional autobiography, or testimonies, for example. Rak (2005) acknowledges the impossibility of setting such a limit that marks an inside and an outside of a genre. This is true for both online and offline life writing. Life writing has been a genre that expanded its limits to accommodate more and more various writing practices. According to Watson and Smith (1992, xviii):

> autobiographical writing is at this historical moment a 'genre of choice,' for authors, audiences, and critics. It surrounds us, but the more it surrounds us, the more it defies generic stabilization, the more its laws are broken, the more it drifts toward other practices, the more formerly 'out-law' practices drift into its domain.

I use the term autobiographical writing in the sense used by Watson and Smith above, as a genre with a capacity to incorporate other unconventional life writing practices. Carolyn Miller's concept of genre as "social action" is crucial to my reading of online life writing as a genre, especially as it relates to the narratives of Palestinian women bloggers (Miller 1984, 152). Miller argues that defining a genre "must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish." Watson and Smith (2010, 31) stress out that life writing is not an individual act of self-narration, but that life writing practices "encode or reinforce particular values in ways that may shape culture and history." Thus, once we stop thinking about genre in terms of limits and borders and think of these borders as continuously shifting, then we can treat blogs as an extension of a larger history of self-representation, especially as it has been employed by women as a powerful authorial tool. Once we start thinking about these blogs that are both inside and outside conventional life writing, then we are able to think of the significance of the subjective voice as it relates to third-world women's

writing, and eventually to third-world women bloggers, Palestinians more specifically. In doing so, the subjective voice can be located within a larger body of third world women's life writing and practices.[24] These practices "become complex sites of negotiations, appropriation, adaptation, resistance, and reformation of subjects-in-process struggling with the terms, limits, and paradoxes of self-representation" (Smith and Watson 2010, 179).

Smith and Watson (1992, 23) further argue that "for the marginalized woman, autobiographical language may serve as a coinage that purchases entry into the social and discursive economy. To enter into language is to press back against total inscription in dominating structures" It is through claiming such a political voice that authority, whether resulting from colonial power or patriarchal control, is questioned and contested explicitly or implicitly. Women as autobiographical speakers resist the process of negation by inscribing their subjectivity, deviating from the dominant discourse. As Smith and Watson (2010, 179), drawing on Mouffe, make clear:

> [Women's] autobiographical performances interrogate cultural norms that have projected on them a subjectivity, an identity, and a life-script—a biography of sorts—of a different order from their own experience of themselves. Confronting their 'Subordination in difference' they engage with codes of representation that have rendered them as objects of representation (Mouffe 382).

In this way, women's life writing, traditionally viewed as a personal practice, is self-consciously made political. Therefore, the 'I' in such forms of life writing is not merely an individual self,

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[24] Smith and Watson (2014, 70) argue that the everyday sites of self-representation that has been enabled by the advent of Web 2.0., though "categorically different from what is understood as traditional life writing," still constitute subjectivities that are "intimately interwoven with the construction of the offline world." Therefore, the theoretical and analytical framework of life writing "can provide helpful concepts and categories for thinking about the proliferation of online lives in varied media and across a wide range of sites" (70).

but it "is constituted through discursive formations, which are heterogeneous, conflictual, and intersectional" (Smith and Watson 2014, 71).

One key characteristic of women's life writing that Moore-Gilbert (2014, 195) highlights is "intergenericity", or "traffic across/between (sub)genres". Some theorists insist on securing established borders for life writing based on some feminist forms which can be characterised by a "promiscuous mixing of life-writing with other genres normally kept apart in mainstream male life-writing" (Moore-Gilbert 2014, 195). This 'intergenericity' is an important feature of online self-expression, which does not generally follow any conventional literary forms, though it might include literary writing, short forms of fiction, or poetry, but most importantly the diarist writing of everyday experiences.

It is also important to note that bloggers as autobiographical speakers can authorise an alternative way of knowing though their projection of subjective "experience". This is what Nancy Hartsock (1990, 171) refers to as "standpoint epistemology", which is "an account of the world as seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top and can transform the margins as well as the center."

Life Writing in Palestinian Literature

A study of Palestinian women blogs does not necessarily indicate the absence of more conventional forms of life writing from the Palestinian literature in general. Whereas in her study of contemporary Palestinian literature in the 1990s, Salma Jayyusi comments that "one of the most interesting phenomena about Palestinian literature today is the abundance of personal account literature" (1992, vii), the previous twenty-five years since Jayyusi made her claim have witnessed a proliferation of autobiographical accounts by Palestinian male and female writers. Examples include Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* (2008); Edward Said's *Out of Place* (1999); Raja Shehadeh's *Strangers in the House* (2002) and *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (2007); Karl Sabbagh's *Palestine: A Personal History* (2006);

and Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima: a Palestinian Story* (2004). Moore-Gilbert (2014, 190) argues that women writers, in particular, employ the life-writing genre partly "because of their suitability as testimonios, as a means to bear witness to the seemingly endless cycles of colonial dispossession and oppression suffered by Palestinians and the often terrible price thereby exacted on their everyday lives." Palestinian women have taken up life writing as a means of making their views and ideas visible in an act of political engagement. An early example of this is Fadwa Tuqan's memoir *A Mountainous Journey* (1945; trans. 1990). Tuqan questions her father's demand to write "nationalist poetry" while being denied access to any form of political participation on the ground. She writes:

> How and with what right does Father ask me to compose political poetry, when I am shut up in these walls? I don't sit with the men, I don't listen to their heated discussions, nor do I participate in the turmoil of life on the outside. I'm still not acquainted with the face of my own country, since I am not allowed to travel. (1990, 107)

A more contemporary example of Palestinian life writing offline is Suad Amiry's *Sharon and my Mother-in-Law*. The book was originally written largely as email correspondence between the writer and a friend in the period Amiry was entrapped in her apartment with her mother-in-law during the siege of Ramallah in 2002, attesting to the function of virtual spaces as an alternative to the immobility imposed in the material world. While the book is a personal and humorous account of the Ramallah siege which lends the book its title, Amiry finds herself obliged to rescue her mother-in-law from the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's forces, which were stationed very close to her apartment located close to Yasser Arafat Ramallah compound. The book is also a memoir of Amiry's life in Ramallah between her return in the 1980s to the two-month siege of Ramallah in 2002. Of course, even the most personal accounts

infused with a sense of humour cannot escape the question of gender in such a politicised space. For example, Amiry's account of the annual demonstration on International Women's Day is an example of her criticism of the gender politics of Palestinian nationalism. She describes the day as "the one day when it is difficult to define who the enemy is. It is also the one day when Palestinian men see Israeli soldiers beat up and shoot at Palestinian women but won't do much about it" (Amiry 2005, 92–93). Moore-Gilbert (2014, 191) points out that despite the "experimental characteristics" of life writing produced by women in Palestine, these works still differ from their comparable modes of Western feminist/revisionist of life writing because of the "concrete historical situations" (Jameson 1981, 104) from which each woman writes. The oppression experienced by women results not only from their gendered and class positions but also from national, social, and sexual oppression.

Blogs in Print

Amiry's book stands out as an example of how internet content, emails in her case, was later published into a memoir, whose literary and cultural value was to add to other more conventional forms of life writing produced in Palestine. In fact, interest in blogs as publishing material have increased in the last decade, and more blog content is being transformed into published literature, both fictional and non-fictional, literary, and political. Gillian Whitlock (2006, 3) explains that such interest in blogs in conflict and war areas derives from their function as "soft weapons" that facilitate dialogues across cultures and help building bridges, as they "personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard."[25] Whitlock uses Salam Pax, the Iraqi cyberlebrity behind the blog "Where

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[25] In *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit*, Whitlock (2006) highlights the importance of looking at the conditions which govern the production, circulation, transmission and reception of life writing. In this sense, she views autobiographical texts as commodities which are transmitted across cultures. Her reading of autobiographical texts is not concerned with the "speaking subject" though she acknowledges that such reading is a fundamental function of life writing which opens spaces "for attending to the recounting of experiences that have previously been excluded." Thus, Whitlock's major concern is the relationship between the reader and the narrator of the autobiography. Most importantly, she is interested in the Western readers of autobiography, their privileged

is Raed?" written during the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, as an example. The blog was later reworked as *The Baghdad Blogger.* Whitlock affirms that such blogs written during these times of crisis are vital to "insert locality, flesh, and time into landscapes that have been evacuated of bodies and history by propaganda from all sides of the war on terror." (Whitlock 2006, 28). In his blog, Pax provides an alternative image of the otherwise highly militarised mapping of Baghdad, which reduced a historically poignant geography and a highly populated place to a "series of accessible targets" (Whitlock 2006, 29). In doing so, he uses this virtual technology to persistently destabilise the privileged and invasive American view of war zones through their own smart technologies. "Where is Raed?" is also an example of the power of blogs to enable "acts of testimony" (Whitlock 2006, 33) as it facilitated accounts otherwise silenced by propaganda. Pax performs a process of cross-cultural communication, in which he succeeds in attracting his readers' interest and empathy through his tactical use of "Arablish … a language of resistance to English as the unquestioned lingua franca of the internet" (Whitlock 2006, 36). In general, Whitlock argues for blogging as another means of autobiographical performance and as a political intervention.

Another example, *We Are Iran*, edited by Nasrin Alavi and published in 2005, was among the first collection of blogs to be published in print and to act as "an archive of Iranians' thoughts on their country, culture, religion, and the rest of the world, but also as an alternative recent history of Iran" (Khiabany and Sreberay 2007). In addition, *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq* (2005) was also a collection of blogs written by an anonymous Iraqi woman of her account of the Iraqi war between 2003 and 2005. "Riverbend", her pseudonym, was at the time the only Iraqi blogger writing from a woman's perspective, thus, giving an account not only of the

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location, and the process of self-construction and self-identification that results from reading "exotic" narratives, and the ways in which this affirms a certain image of the self vs the other. Whitlock's work on online life writing, specifically blogging, is important, yet my reading of blogs by Palestinian women writers does not engage with their conditions of transmission or reception. My research aims instead at investigating the political, cultural, and literary possibilities of narratives emerging online, in relation to the territorial, political context of Palestine.

occupation of her country but of the transformation of gender relations as a result. Similarly, "Raising Yousuf: A Diary of a Mother Under Occupation" was the first Palestinian personal weblog with entries as early as 2004. The blog was created by Palestinian mother and journalist, Laila El-Haddad, who at the time was a resident of Gaza. The blog was published in hard copy in 2010 under the title *Gaza Mom* and has carried the name since. Laila's first entry is a personal account of her entrapment outside of Gaza after border closure, disclosing again the importance of the online space for allowing mobility largely absent offline. In her autobiographical "about" page, where bloggers present a brief introduction about themselves, Laila writes:

> I am a Palestinian from Gaza City. I am a journalist. I am a blogger. I am a mother. I am a Muslim. I am a Media Activist. This blog is about the trials of raising my children between spaces and identities; displacement and occupation; and everything that entails from potty training to border crossings ... Together, we endure a lot, and the personal becomes political. This is our story.

In Laila's diary-style blog, the mundane realities of motherhood intersect with the immobile reality of border closure and waiting at the Egyptian-Gaza borders. She narrates her intimate mother-son moments in juxtaposition to her frustration with her uncertainty over when she would be able to cross. Her blog "excels in marrying the everyday with the surreal and the domestic with the political, moving from anxiety about Yusuf's toilet training to her own panic attacks from incessant Israeli sonic booms to chaos in Gaza's streets" (Johnson 2011, 87). As we read through her first blogs, we can sense the exasperation in her colloquial everyday tone, which leads to her everyday narratives online. Laila (2004) makes an appeal to be heard:

> Sigh, maybe I'm being a little melodramatic, but I'm stuck in Cairo alone with a 9-month-old in an unfurnished flat, so cut me some slack here. Who am I talking to again? Who knows. But if you've gotten this far I applaud you (you're

either bored yourself or also have a 9-month old in a big, horribly polluted, sorely unfashionable city.

In a review of her book, Penny Johnson (2011, 86) states:

> Blogs are of course problematic sources - generally with no claim to standards of journalism, and replete with opinion rather than evidence, although El-Haddad's matter-of-fact voice and her eye for detail do generate trust. Still, it is precisely because blogs do not claim to tell the "full story" with a clear narrative line, but rather offer a succession of moments in time, that they may capture the complicated texture of events in a place like Gaza.

Laila provides fragments of her life as she moves the narrative across borders in and outside of Gaza. In fact, her witty writing makes of her very mundane everyday maternal tasks something political: such as describing in detail the daunting process of toilet training and then moving to discuss how the potty itself was made in Israel, shedding light on the increasingly strict policies of closure imposed by the state of Israel. In another incident, Laila speaks of the difficulty of raising a child in a place like Gaza, as she confesses, "You know things ain't right when a child has become so accustomed to warplanes that he confuses them with birds." Or when breastfeeding while working as a journalist, Laila remarks on how she was "conducting an important interview on the phone and Yousuf crawls onto my lap, pulls up my shirt, and starts uncontrollably chirping 'bizzah, bizzah!' (translation: Boobie! Boobie!) to the horror of the person on the other line."

And just like Amiry's book, which was born out of the everyday experience of confinement, which led to her online correspondence, Laila's narrative also emerges from a sense of confinement. Her narratives speak to the need for a voice in which women can move beyond this confinement that is largely caused by the broader colonial context; but it also means

inserting the gendered non-censored voice of a mother into a nationalist narrative. Laila's blog gave her a chance at narrating her life in a way her career as a journalist could not have. In many ways, her blog "stands better than her journalism" (Johnson 2011, 87). Palestinian women bloggers are aware of the autobiographical opportunity offered to them by the internet, and they claim the online space to narrate their stories and realities. They make an informed decision to make public the most intimate of their stories, lives, memories, and histories. They themselves understand the opportunity offered by the online space and the space of the blogs and sometimes openly declare it. For example, on Mariam Barghouti's "About" page, she writes:

> This blog was birthed out of a necessity to reclaim a narrative. It serves as an echo chamber that brings thought[s] to life and translates them into a canvas of words and images. It initially began as a space to counter the narrative that was being built in my name as a young Palestinian woman by the media. Slowly, it grew to become more than that, a space to freely express without any censorship or attached agendas.

My reading of Palestinian women's blog narratives as a life-writing practice aims at opening up possibilities for a more expansive approach to the critical reading and interpretation of this work. It allows for an alternative orientation to those narratives, one that is neither empirical nor quantitative, but that rather engages culturally with the texts produced online as compelling and productive sites of life writing and as legible means of self-expression. Such texts offer readers a new perspective on the relationship between national narratives and the gendered voice, as it is manifested in the online narratives of these women. Such a reading can also offer insights into how Palestinian women construct their complex identities, conjoin distinct memories, and represent diverse embodied everyday experiences.

Chapter 3.   Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I review the existing literature on the main conceptual and theoretical frameworks through which the question of gender and Palestinian narratives has been approached, and which inform and direct this study and analysis of selected online narratives of Palestinian women bloggers. In addressing postcolonial theory's lack of engagement with Palestinian literary and cultural production, "with the obvious exception of attention paid to the work of Said" (Moore 2014, 241), scholars have recently made significant efforts to relocate Palestinian cultural expression within a number of existing postcolonial debates, illustrating "the exciting forms of interdisciplinary cross-pollination that take place when unfamiliar theoretical and textual forms are placed in dialogue with questions of postcoloniality" (Williams and Ball 2014, 131).

In the first section of this chapter, I briefly explore Palestine's peculiar relation to the "postcolonial", which has long resulted in the marginalisation of Palestine's cultural production in postcolonial studies. I also problematise the efforts to co-opt Palestine into postcolonial celebratory approaches to migrancy, transnationalism, border-crossing, and hybridity. I argue that in reading online narratives produced within a context of coloniality such as that of Palestine, it is important to revisit postcolonial questions of resistance, representation, and national narration. Situating Palestine within postcolonial theory brings to the fore the necessity to revisit the relation of postcolonial studies to contemporary narratives of the nation, rather than assuming anticolonial narratives as an outdated terrain that have already been discussed in the theory's earlier texts. Stressing the significance of the nation as an important political tool of liberation and self-determination rather than dismissing it in the Palestinian context, I draw on postcolonial concepts of nations and narrations.

In the second section, I move into gender as a significant category of analysis of national narratives in the Palestinian context, reviewing some of the main gendered tropes in the narratives of the nation, such as "the motherland, the virgin land, and the rape of the land", thus, revealing a larger dynamic of gendered representation at work. This section examines the intersection between colonial, orientalist, nationalist and gendered constructions of the nation, specifically in relation to competing Palestinian and Zionist nationalist narratives. In this sense, I discuss the symbolic relation between women and nation in these 'narratives of origin' and its implications for women in contemporary Palestine.

In the third section, I explain the significance of postcolonial feminist theory in reading Palestinian women's blogs. I bring in the main debates around the suspicious attitudes towards feminism in most third-world contexts, especially in their earlier relation to colonial control, and some first-world global approaches to feminism. With reference to Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1992) and Ella Shohat's (1997) respective critiques of *Sisterhood is Global*, I draw on Mohanty's concept of the "politics of engagement," a feminist analysis that aims at "uncovering alternative, non-identical histories which challenge and disrupt the spatial and temporal location of a hegemonic history" (Mohanty 1992, 84).

Overall, then, this chapter presents a review of selected theoretical and conceptual frameworks which relate to the ways Palestinian women bloggers understand themselves as Palestinians and as gendered historical subjects. The literatures on concepts of the nation, gender, colonialism, orientalism, and nationalist narratives are vast and beyond the scope of the thesis and this chapter; the theories and concepts I refer to here, therefore, aim to help readers understand the confluence of theoretical and conceptual concerns that shape this study of bloggers and their textual production. This underpins the analysis of the narrative dynamics and the power politics which largely influence women bloggers' writing.

Palestine and the Postcolonial

Re-locating Palestine within the Postcolonial

As I read the narratives of Palestinian women bloggers from a feminist postcolonial perspective, I am, in effect, engaging with the ongoing question of Palestine's relation to the colonial and the postcolonial. The question of Palestine's postcoloniality has not yet been agreed on or fully established for several reasons, including the inability to locate Palestine, with its current status, within a precise condition or definition of coloniality. This has raised some key debates: Is Palestine a "postcolonial nation"? Or is it another case of "settler colonialism" or "neo-colonialism" (Shohat 1992)? Or is it what Joseph Massad (2000) explains as the "postcolonial colony"?[26] Given the controversy over its condition of coloniality or postcoloniality, situating Palestine within a precise framework of critical analysis and theory has been problematic due to the nation's unique colonial history. This inability to define Palestine within such conclusive paradigms of analysis has nevertheless allowed critics the possibility of diverse readings of narratives produced within such a locality. Nonetheless, there has been a significant gap in addressing the question of Palestine in postcolonial studies. In his introduction to *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha (1990, 7) recognises the absence of Palestinian voices in the edited collection. He writes that "amidst these exorbitant images of the nation-space in its transnational

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[26] In his "The 'Post-Colonial' Colony: Time, Space, and Bodies in Palestine/Israel" Joseph Massad (2000, 312) for example argues that "the end of colonialism" brings about "postcolonialism." Massad asks how to determine the "coloniality" or the "postcoloniality" of a single space with two competing national narratives, the postcolonial Israel according to Israelis after 1948, and the colonized space according to Palestinians after 1948. This indicates or illustrates a certain struggle over naming which, according to Massad, functions "as locating in history, as temporalizing, and, ultimately, as asserting power as colonial domination or anticolonial resistance." Therefore, do we name this space Palestine or Israel? Patrick Williams (2016) responds to Massad's definition of postcolonialism as correct but not completely accurate because postcoloniality is not about a "temporal succession". He also criticises Massad's postulation on the issue of naming, arguing that postcolonial theory does not take for granted nor as a truth "the notional self-representation" of the settler-states or the colonizer's discourse of self-representation. "Postcolonial studies was not premised on not taking colonial self-representation at face value" (95), argues Williams (2016), thus proposing that Massad's argument fails to acknowledge or to identify the colonial nature of such states, regardless of how they choose to define themselves.

dimension there are those who have not yet found their nation: among them the Palestinians and the Black South Africans. It is our loss that in making this book we were unable to add their voices to ours." However, Bhabha does not explain this absence. The reasons behind postcolonial theory's lack of engagement with Palestinian voices and texts are various.[27] Patrick Williams and Anna Ball (2014, 128) explain that it is easy, though not accurate, to argue that Palestine is not yet "post" the colonial, as it is subject to the settler colonial project of Zionism. However, such explanation neglects that "anti-colonial discourse authored by those writing under the yoke of colonialism forms the very backbone of the field". Williams and Ball (2014) stress that postcoloniality is not a temporal critique. The broader understanding of the term indicates that it is "not in any sense an achieved condition, but … an anticipatory discourse, looking forward to a better and as yet unrealized world: an understanding that facilitates the analysis of multiple forms of inequality, oppression and struggle" (Williams 2010, 93). I am interested in this understanding of postcolonial theory as capable of incorporating and reading "the multiple forms of oppression", in a context where coloniality as well as projects of nation-building are suggestive of a daily oppressive reality. In this way, a postcolonial reading of Palestinian online narratives can help unfold the multi-dimensional power dynamics which inform or restrict these narratives, and can also reveal the alternative narratives produced in such a context and the way these narratives not only represent reality but envision an alternative one as well.

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[27] In "Gaps, Silences and Absences: Palestine and Postcolonial Studies", Williams (2016, 92-94) addresses the various reasons why Palestine has not been included or has long been sidelined by postcolonial studies. First, he argues that from the beginning, postcolonial scholars were looking somewhere else in the former colonies, in the Caribbean, in Australia, Africa, the Indian subcontinent. Second is Israel's continuous ability to sustain the argument that it is not a colonial power due to the historical claim over Palestine as the natural land for Jews and the claim that Israel fought and won a war for national liberation. Third is the issue of timing as the emergence of postcolonial studies corresponded to a time in the history of Palestinians and Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the aftermath of the siege of Lebanon in the 1980s and the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon, which witnessed the constant demonization of the Palestinians, especially by the mainstream media. Another possible reason for the absence of Palestine, listed by Williams, is related to the numerous misunderstandings of what postcolonial studies is or does, and whether it has anything relevant to say about Palestine.

In the past decade, there has been an increasing effort to address this gap of Palestine's relation to the postcolonial by many postcolonial scholars, including Anna Bernard (2013), Ball (2012, 2014), Williams (2014, 2016), and Moore-Gilbert (2018).[28] In effect, the recent effort to relocate Palestinian narratives within the postcolonial has resulted in expanding the "limited set" of postcolonial tropes and approaches from which Palestinian narratives have been studied (Ball 2012). Bernard (2013, 14) argues that "Palestine has played a minor role within dominant formations of metropolitan postcolonial literary studies, despite the routine use of the Palestinian as an 'abject' figure of oppression (Stein, 2005, 331)." Therefore, Palestinians have either been seen as figures of homelessness as in Bhabha (1990); or as "an exception to the largely celebratory poststructuralist models of diaspora as indicative of a liberated, 'borderless world' (an extremely troubling idea for Palestinians)" (Ball 2012, 6). Offering a postcolonial reading of Palestinian texts can help problematise such polemical views of Palestinians as either "powerless victims" or "resistance fighters." Ball (2012, 7) argues that postcolonial theory can offer more than such a "limited set of tropes", which might help "establish diverse and self-reflexive reassessments of Palestinian culture and identity: from Fanonian discourses of resistance to those of postcolonial performativity[29]; from theories of nationhood and nationalism to those of diasporic 'transnations' and 'borderlands'."

Ball's reading and critique of Palestinian narratives from such an expansive postcolonial perspective has informed many arguments within this thesis, especially in its focus on the question of gender; however, it also highlights a certain need for progression within

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[28] The *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, for example, dedicated its second issue of Volume 50 (1014) to Palestine and the Postcolonial: Culture, Creativity and Theory.

[29] Fanon's anticolonial revolutionary texts, including *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965) and *Black Skin White Masks* (1982)*,* were regarded as some of the early texts of postcolonial literary theory. Fanon explains in the former book the role of national and nationalist art and literature. "Literature of combat", as Fanon explains, aims at raising national consciousness and is a form of resistance. These forms of nationalist rhetoric "call on whole people to fight for their existence as a nation … it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons" (Fanon 1967, 240). The purpose of arts, including music, painting, and writing among other forms, is "no longer that of univocation but rather of the assembling of the people, a summoning together to awaken the native's sensibility and to make unreal and unacceptable the contemplative attitude, or the acceptance of defeat" (243).

postcolonial theory itself, a need that relates to the concept of temporality and linearity.[30] On

the one hand, Ball's study of Palestinian literature and film from a postcolonial perspective

shows the diversity of narratives produced within such contexts and the wealth of material that

can be approached using recent postcolonial theories of transnationalism and border-crossing.

On the other hand, there is a sense that these Palestinian texts and cultural forms of self-

expression need to go beyond the "traditional postcolonial tropes" and align themselves with

more recent postcolonial theoretical accounts. Therefore, a study of anticolonial nationalist

narratives might sound dated if it does not align itself within more contemporary postcolonial

concerns.[31] Hence, despite such suppositions about the non-temporality of the "post" in

postcolonial theory (as in the "post" does not necessarily indicate the end of an era, postcolonial

theory in the past few decades has witnessed a "postmodern" progression towards a celebratory

approach to "deterritorialism", border spaces and border-crossing, diasporic figures, and

displacement. This need for refinement of the theory has led to the sidelining of specific texts

that deal more directly with the question of colonialism and the experiences of the colonised,

their oppressive experiences of border-crossing, or displacement, for example.

Theoretical frameworks that try to explain the experiences of the colonised in anticolonial

struggles are often assumed to be outdated frames of analysis dismissed in favour of a reading

of the present as a global contemporary postcolonial world. Bernard (2013, 8) addresses this

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[30] Ball (2012, 38) argues that "Palestine arguably presents an important affront to the limitations of what Anne McClintock describes as the implied temporal linearity present in the term 'post-colonialism', which renders it 'prematurely celebratory' within a world still very much confronting colonial phenomena."

[31] Especially with the move from the national to the global. In his critique of postcolonial theory in *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, Lazarus (2011, 21) lists the assumptions and investments predominant in postcolonial studies as "a constitutive anti-Marxism; an undifferentiating disavowal of all forms of nationalism and a corresponding exaltation of migrancy, liminality, hybridity, and multi-culturality; an hostility towards " holistic forms of social explanation (towards totality and systemic analysis); an aversion to dialectics; and a refusal of an antagonistic or, struggle-based model of politics," thus, outlining the field's move from the national to the global, as well as highlighting the move beyond nationalism as a legitimate political tool of self-determination in many contemporary contexts. Williams (2016) criticises such definition by Lazarus, as Williams sees that the definition, coming from one of the theory's main critics, has a certain authority and sidelines many other important investments of postcolonial theory. Besides, it sets postcolonial theory as an invalid frame of analysis for texts produced within nationalist contexts despite Lazarus' critical approach to the theory, and his argument for the need to go beyond texts that have become canonised in this theory and the need to approach contexts and geographies that have been sidelined.

problem within postcolonial theory as "the tendency to dismiss what is not new." Commenting on this recent need to dismiss the nation as a primary contemporary concern in many anticolonial contexts, including Palestine, Bernard (2013, 8) argues:

> Instead of seeing more recent invocations of the nation as late arrivals, attempting to achieve a form of liberation that has already been proved illusory, we need to be able to recognize the continuing importance of ideas of the nation to contemporary forms of social and political organization.

A study of blogs written by Palestinian women who are writing from a context of anticolonial national struggle defies such a need for theoretical 'progression'. The everyday narratives of these blogs highlight the need to revisit postcolonial theory's relation to narratives produced within contemporary contexts of coloniality and nation-building, which are overlooked by the "postnational, hybrid, and globalized academic and social world" (Miguel, 2009, 191). While those recent elements of postcolonial theory do address certain aspects of the Palestinian experience, they still fail to address the persistent daily reality of colonialism and its implications as those female bloggers experience it. Despite its recent dismissal of nationalism and the nation-state, the very first tropes of postcolonial theory continue to apply to many contexts of a collective struggle for liberation where the nation is still the primary concern. Palestine's relation to the postcolonial invites a reconsideration of the most basic terms "in the postcolonial lexicon, such as resistance and representation" (Williams 2016, 96). These basic terms, which have constituted the backbone of postcolonial theory and which have been visited repeatedly, are still relevant in any analysis of Palestinian attempts at self-representation, even those which are invoked by the utilisation of the new forms of and forums for writing and writing back. In fact, the analysis of narratives emerging from the utilisation of new tools for self-representation, including blogs, can thus function as a way to "rescue and reconstruct

postcolonial studies" by inviting, according to Neil Lazarus cited in Ball and Williams (2014, 128):

> those working in the discipline to abandon their canonical blinkers and biases, and address texts, authors and topics that they routinely ignore. Texts that are unashamedly political; texts that tackle the thorny problem of postcolonial nationalism; texts from language groups other than the Anglophone.

These contemporary forms of narrative that are daily produced within such a context draw attention again to questions of ordinary people's resistance to colonial subjugation and discourse, self-representation, imagining the nation, and reconsideration of narratives of the margin. Blogs as a platform utilised by the marginalised to write back, to narrate daily experiences of colonial control, become another significant space of exploration, and a witness to the continuing need for an urgent voice to express an ongoing colonial reality. Thus, building on Bhabha's assumption that nations are narrations, I explore the ways these narratives construct existing or alternative ways of narrating the nation, focusing on the gendered implication of such national narrations.

Nation and Narration

Many national discourses are invested in the construction of images of their "imagined community" through representation of the homeland. Sherwell (2003, 130) argues that:

> representations provide members of the imagined community with ways of imaging where the people of the nation originate and belong by situating them in a place and providing an imaginary space in which the community comes together, as well as a source from which they originate.

Reference to nationalist narratives in this chapter is a reference to narratives of "origin". As I have already stated, this builds on Anderson's work on the nation as an imagined construct. The nation is not only a geographical space, but also "a discursive construct in which a certain communal identity comes into being" (Ball, 2012, 19). Imagining the nation thus comes to the fore in narratives of common and shared origins, shared space and shared identity. According to Ball (2012), these narratives become "naturalized" as "'ancient' or ahistorical" (19). I also employ Ella Shohat's (1997, 186) concept of "national intertexts"—literary, oral narratives, music—narratives projecting traditional national imaginaries or "iconography" across varied cultural and creative production. These frames assist in accounting for the diverse selected examples of national texts covered in this chapter. In doing so, I attempt to make up for the lack of an in-depth study of Palestinian narratives on the blogosphere by situating the narratives of Palestinian women bloggers within the larger body of "nationalist intertexts."

In the online space, similar nationalist intertexts dominate most of the discussions on Palestine as a national space. These national sentiments result from Palestinians' ongoing struggle for a sense of national place on the ground. The effort to connect Palestine with its diasporic community via online fora has been discussed by Aouragh (2011, 2012) in relation to Anderson's concept of a community with a shared language, shared history, and origin, coming together in the virtual space. Therefore, the recurrence of such nationalist imagery and iconography is arguably inevitable. The nationalist tropes discussed within this chapter find their way into and infuse the national construction of Palestine in the online realm.

Most of the scholarly research that has so far studied Palestine's relation to the online space has been entirely focused on the question of the national, as has been discussed in Chapter Two. Aouragh's *Palestine Online* (2012) is an important reference to how Palestine as a nation has been imagined online through the various websites, blogs, and social networks. Aouragh (2012, 20) documents an online transnational identity that is nationalistic in nature despite the absence

of a nation-state on the ground. This major contribution to Palestine's virtual presence has, rather, focused on counter-narratives, establishing a Palestinian homeland online, or connecting home with diaspora through various online platforms. This research has been very important, and I extend it here by providing in-depth analysis of nationalist narratives, as well as by considering the interrelationship between gender and the construction of nation in the online space.[32]

Engendering the Nation

In this section, I present a brief, selective review of the existing literature on issues of gender and Palestinian and Zionist nationalist narratives, respectively. I mainly focus on the intersections between nationalism, colonialism, and orientalism and how these competing narratives have long shaped the process of imaging Palestine as a space consisting in various gendered narrative contestations.

Postcolonial feminists have investigated the gendered construction of narratives of the nation "revealing further axes of sexed and gendered power in operation within the very nation" (Ball 2012, 18). In her *Stories of Women*, Elleke Boehmer (2005, 22) draws attention to the sexual formation of postcolonial nations with their "nationalist ideologies" and the implications of such nationalist gendered imaginings on postcolonial texts post 1947. In Palestine, a nation that has not yet witnessed its postcolonial moment, as I argued above, the gendered narration of the nation, resulting in different gendered tropes and symbols, is implicated in the larger colonial and orientalist discourse of desire. Palestinian nationalist narratives are ultimately in an ongoing dialogue with Zionist nationalist narratives that also capture several tropes of gendered colonial

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[32] There is a paucity of material discussing narrative in the blogosphere and its relation to formations of national identity. However, Robins' (2016) study on the performance of Palestinian identity online is helpful, with its specific focus on narratives of Palestinian bloggers published through the activist website *Electronic Intifada*. Also, see Najjar (2010) for a study on Palestinians' online self-representation during the military Operation Cast Lead on Gaza in 2008/2009.

and orientalist desires. Ball (2014) explains that anticolonial nationalism in Palestine has risen in response to the construction of Israel, the latter as a narrative of domination, one aimed at annihilating the presence of Palestinians in the land. Thus, nationalism, for Palestinians, is a narrative that essentially reclaims "presence."[33] As a result, Palestine's nationalist discourse exists at the crossroad of "colonial, orientalist, Zionist narratives" (Ball 2012, 20), all of which have "come to bear on variously defined versions of Palestinian space in ways that imagine its origin and identity in radically different manners" (Ball 2012, 20). Similarly, Susan Slyomovics (2002, 114) suggests that "all descriptions of Palestine as a contested, colonized space … illuminate gender issues where interactions between colonizer and colonized are imagined as relations between males and females." Highlighting some of the most frequently recurring gendered tropes within Palestinian nationalist discourse thus is therefore essential to performing a gendered reading of Palestinian women bloggers' narratives.

The Motherland and the Virgin Land: The Narrative of the Female Soil

The practice of narrating the national space as a woman using gendered tropes such as the "motherland" and the "virgin land" permeates many nationalist intertexts. Ball (2012, 20) suggests that the gendered nature of national narratives results from the inherent feminisation of the nation as a concept: "it is inherent in the very 'birth' of nationhood as a concept." Anne

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[33] The rise of Arab nationalism was a response to a long history of colonialism. The Sykes-Picot agreement (1916), aimed at determining spheres of control and influence over the Arab world by Britain and France, was followed by the Balfour Declaration (1917), promising a homeland for Jews in Palestine, and the recognition of mandate by the League of Nations in 1922. Palestine came under the British mandate and split off to become Transjordan (later known as Jordan), while the remaining part of Palestine came under British control and witnessed a great wave of Jewish immigration. As a result of the decaying Ottoman Empire and the European colonisation of the Arab region (both East and West), mainly by France and Britain, Arab nationalism arose (Hourani 1991, 209–10). An anticolonial discourse deriving from an Arab and Muslim identity and emphasising cultural integrity emerged in the early years of the twentieth century. Massad (1995, 469) argues that as a result of the diversity of national cultures as well as European influence, nationalism tended to be secularist and constitutionalist. "Nationalist politics across the region", Moore (2008, 27) states, "varied between calls for reform, resistance, power sharing, and ousting of the colonial power." Despite its secular aspect, nationalism still insisted on cultural integrity drawing on its Arab and Muslim identity. Massad (1995) argues that one of the most important underpinnings of anticolonial national struggles is the combination of the two contradictory aspects of modernisation and tradition. Drawing on Chatterjee's (1993b) proposition that nationalists were seeking modernisation in their construction of the new nation-states, they still asserted their distinct "traditional national culture" (Massad 1995, 467).

McClintock (1997, 90) argues that the etymological root of the word 'nation' is the Latin *natio*, which means to be born. This derivation might allude to the construction of the nation as a familial construct, protected by a maternal and fertile mother. The cultural adoption of the intimate relation between the nation and notions of femininity proves similar in many cultures; in Arabic, it is "al-watan al-umm" resonating with "the motherland". Carol Bardenstein (1997, 170) explains that:

> Portrayals of the 'homeland as a woman' abounds in the modern Arabic literary tradition as in so many others, replete with (sons) yearning for the homeland, longing to unite or reunite with it, and to defend its honor against its invaders. These portrayals may be viewed as more recent manifestations of a long tradition in Arabic literature of idealized unions with a feminized Other, longed for and realized. Those that have emerged within contemporary Palestinian context are mostly pointedly shaped by the specific experience of occupation and resistance.

Likewise, in the nationalist discourse of Zionism, Palestine was referred to as the Zionist "motherland" to which the Jewish people would return home, disregarding the natives either as 'illegitimate inhabitants', or as non-existent.[34] Although Israel only came into existence as a nation-state in 1948, the colonisation of Palestine preceded that through narrating the space as the "motherland" awaiting the return of its Jewish inhabitants, laying historical and religious

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[34] Israel Zangwill, a prominent Anglo-Jewish writer and an early spokesman for Zionism and one of its early organisers in Britain, has helped widely circulate the idea of "the land without a people for the people without land" in the West. But even in its later texts, Zionism persisted in ignoring the native population. In March 1914, Chaim Weizmann, who was to become the first president of Israel stated that: "In its initial stage, Zionism was conceived by its pioneers as a movement wholly depending on mechanical factors: there is a country which happens to be called Palestine, a country without a people, and, on the other hand, there exists the Jewish people, and it has no country. What else is necessary, then, than to fit the gem into the ring, to unite this people with this country? The owners of the country [the Turks] must, therefore, be persuaded and convinced that this marriage is advantageous, not only for the [Jewish] people and for the country, but also for themselves." Cited in Masalha (1992,).

claim to the territory. This act of engendering the national space, however, came at the expense

of silencing and, thus negating, the presence of a native population. Massad (2000) sees this

nationalist trope of the "motherland" as an indicator of the colonial nature of Zionist nationalist

narrative, where "the image of the land as mother is linked inherently to the sexual and

reproductive project of colonial settler nationalism" (332). Settlers who would be born to the

new nation are its children as well as the cultivators of its land. In this sense, the gendered tropes

of Zionist discourse, especially its earlier forms of national formulation, have been indicative

of the colonial and masculinist desire for mastery: "a mastery that emerged through the

production of narratives of the Israeli 'self', and erasure of the narrative presence of the

Palestinian 'other'" (Ball 2012, 29). The 'narrative erasure' of Palestinians from the land

alludes to another nationalist trope in Zionist narrative, which previewed Palestine as the virgin

land, "a blank page to be written upon" (Ball 2012, 23). [35] This territory was assumed to be

waiting for the return of its Israeli Sabra, or the new Jew, according to early Zionist discourse,

who served as an "anti-thesis" to the diasporic Jew "perceived as passive and effeminate"

(Massad 2000, 342). This Maccabean was characterised as having physical strength and

readiness to defend his honour, the Zionist ideal of manliness. The gendered and sexualised

nature of the imperialist, colonialist and orientalist narratives of Zionism sought, in this way, to

justify its colonial mastery of the land. The purity of the land and its fertility, its ripeness and

readiness to flourish were essential to Israel's narrative of "making the desert bloom." The

Israeli Sabra would be both "'deflowerer and inseminator of his mother/ virgin land' and master

of a new civilization" (Ball 2012, 25). He should take upon his shoulder the task of cultivating,

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[35] This narrative erasure of Palestinians within Zionist nationalist discourse constitutes an ongoing denial of Palestinian existence and history. One of the latest examples is a book appearing on Amazon's bestseller list for in the "Israel & Palestine History" category and it was the 543rd most sold book on the website in 2017. *A History of the Palestinian People from Ancient times to Modern Era* is by Assaf A. Voll, an Israeli academic and a 'creative specialist.' The book which claims to cover 3000 years of Palestinian history is but a text comprising 120 blank pages. Amazon removed the book which caused a major controversy, but it was still reported in most mainstream Israeli newspapers, including *Jerusalem Post* and *Jewish Press*. It was criticised in *Haaretz* as perpetuating a right-wing fantasy.

thus civilising the empty barren land, "a typical rescue fantasy", which rescues the land from itself and 'tames' its primitive nature (Ball 2012, 25). For Said, such views were evidence that Zionism was perpetuating a discourse of European colonial settlement. This colonial attitude towards the land, Said (1997) explains, was also perceived as the distinction between the civilised and the noncivilised. Said (1997, 28) notes, "A civilised man, it was believed, could cultivate the land because it meant something to him; on it, accordingly, he bred useful arts and crafts, he created, he accomplished, he built. For an uncivilised people, land was either farmed badly or it was left to rot." Similarly, Derek Gregory (2004, 81) points out that comparing Jewish colonisation to modernisation has served "to legitimize the dispossession of Palestinians." By extension, Ball (2012) points out that

> The myth of the virgin land is also the myth of the empty land, involving both a gender and a racial dispossession … Within patriarchal narratives, to be a virgin is to be empty of desire and void of sexual agency … Within colonial narratives, the eroticizing of 'virgin' space also effects a territorial appropriation, for if the land is virgin, colonized peoples cannot claim aboriginal territorial rights (25).

Gendered Anticolonial Nationalism

The gendered tropes characterising Zionist portrayals of the Palestinian space as feminine and empty have found their response in Palestinian nationalist discourse. Palestinian nationalist narratives extended such tropes in representation of the Palestinian experience of loss that followed the Nakba of 1948. Palestinian nationalist literature has a plethora of images of the land imagined as a woman, whether a motherland, a virgin land, or a lover. For example, "A Lover from Palestine" (Darwish 1981), a poem by Mahmoud Darwish, is replete with such images of the feminine land: a lover yearning for his feminine beloved, a son longing to return to his motherland. As such, the land of Palestine is metaphorised as women's bodies: "Her eyes

are Palestinian/ Her name is Palestinian/ Her dreams and sorrows are Palestinian" (Elmessiri 1982, 121). Such traditional Palestinian portrayals of the relationship between the land and its people as a union between the feminine and the masculine resulted in recurrent images of the disrupted union, the rape, bringing about a discourse of (dis)honour or 'Ird in need to protect the motherland (Hasso 1998, 442).[36] Such a portrayal has been displayed in many official Palestinian nationalist narratives, popular discourse, and even in the nationalist literary imagination. For example, in the Palestinian nationalist charter, the establishment of the state of Israel was viewed as "a rape of the land" (Palestinian National Charter as cited in Massad 1995, 470).[37] In this charter, Palestine is also portrayed as the mother of the children of the nation. This nationalist narrative resonated with the Zionist narrative in which Palestine was viewed as both the "motherland" and the "virgin-land." This, in turn, echoes an orientalist discourse where the Orient is portrayed "as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem, and the despotic—but curiously attractive ruler" (Said 2000, 212). The construction of this space through gendered metaphors, argues Ball (2012, 35), "once again relegates female sexuality to the realm of the primarily symbolic, whereby women's violation assumes a political status as a front to the patriarchal order of the nation." Here, resistance is also viewed as an act of redeeming 'the honour' lost as a result of losing the motherland. Representation of the nation as a woman, thus, triggered the notion of honour in the discourse of Palestinian nationalism. As manifested in various examples of nationalist Arabic and Palestinian poetry, defending honour against the invaders of the motherland becomes another

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[36] In a study on the meanings of Palestinian motherhood in the discourse of the Intifada between 1987 and 1993, Kanako Mabuchi (2003, 11) argues that "what constitutes honour is culturally specific." This notion of honour 'sharaf' or 'ird' was dependent on a man's ability to keep the behaviour of his kinswomen under control. Women were seen as part of the familial sacred realm, the familial realm that stands in opposition to colonial attempts at breaking down the family structure. Thus, women had to be protected so that the 'Ird' of the family and its reputation might be protected.

[37] Along with the Palestinian National Charter of 1968 (Al-Mithaq al-Watani), the Palestinian Nationalist Charter of 1964 (Al-Mithaq al-Qawmi) was the first document issued by the PLO and resembled the earliest forms of constitution which defined "Palestinian political goals, Palestinian rights, indeed 'Palestinianness' itself." (Massad 1995, 470).

gendered trope in many poetic representations of this space. In a poem titled "Night Strings" written by Muzzaffar al-Nawwab in the 1960s, which has continuously been invoked, revived and recited at critical moments in the history of Palestinian resistance, including during the first and the second Intifada, al-Nawwab[38] writes:

> Jerusalem is the bride of your Arabness!!
>
> So why did you usher all the fornicators of the night into her room,
>
> And stand eavesdropping from behind the door
>
> To the screams of her torn virginity
>
> You drew your daggers, and swelled with pride
>
> And you yelled at her to keep quiet, for honor's sake
>
> How honorable of you!!

One of the main metaphors of the poem invokes the image of a bride who is being raped on her wedding night. Palestine, which is referred to as Jerusalem, is portrayed as the bride of Arab nationalism, and "she is forced by the invading enemy into an unnatural union and violently raped" (Benderstein 1997, 170). In this manner, such images disturbing the natural "union" of the bride and its people are prominent in highlighting notions of honour, which, according to Benderstein, itself is implicated in "traditional configurations of power drawn along gender lines" (171). It is a variation on the theme of the master rescue narrative, as Benderstein also argues: "men … as the real subjects and actors in history, are being called upon to enact the traditional rescue narrative of the helpless woman, and are being harshly rebuked and insulted for not having done so at the crucial moment" (171). Liberating the land meant preserving

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[38] The Arabic poem "Watariyat Layliya" was composed by the poet Muzzaffar al-Nawaab between 1970 and 1975. The two-hour-long poem was clandestinely circulated in cassettes across the Arab world, where the poet's work was banned in most of its countries. The above-mentioned lines were translated in Bardenstein (1997, 171).

masculinist honour, and thereby wielding control over its women, preventing them from causing the men any 'shame'. Comparing the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land to the sexual act of rape has meant that the notion of honour since 1948 has expanded in its nationalist as well as familial significance. Imagining the nation as a woman has thus functioned as undermining the masculinity of Palestinian men whose nation is under foreign control. Ball (2012, 13) argues that

> For the male colonised subject, the task in hand is therefore to reclaim his status as male 'self' rather than feminised 'other'. This assertion of masculine selfhood appears through motifs of familial relations in Palestinian nationalist expression, where the male subject is represented both as the patriarchal 'father'– the master, defender and inseminator of the 'motherland'– and as a 'son of the soil': a child of Palestine, legitimate heir to the land whose duty is to protect his 'mother' from harm.

Women and the Burden of Allegory

This gendered representation of the nation as a woman has had implications for women and their representation within nationalist narratives. In their discussion of gender and the nation, Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) discuss five significant roles of women within most national agendas. These roles include women as the biological bearers of members of ethnic collectives; as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/ national groups (through sexual and marital restrictions); as ideological transmitters of the collective culture; as signifiers of ethnic/national differences; and as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles. These roles set the codes for proper "womanhood" within nationalist contexts which Ball (2012, 20) reads as having a "property of 'otherness.'" In the Palestinian context, through the national struggle, new relations between men and women emerged and have encouraged new socio-

political roles; however, Palestinian nationalism has also invited a drive to return to a pre-colonial past. Mehdid (1993, 7) argues that in most nationalist discourses, the past is "conceived as a refuge and evocations of its golden pre-eminence served a male desire to keep women in bondage." Mehdid (1993, 10) explains that, "the move is understood in feminist terms as a symbolic return of women to their allegedly socio-cultural roles as guardians of the home and tradition and in terms of a resurgent patriarchy." This might explain the persistence and resilience of patriarchy in anticolonial struggles and the "populist belief that the reinstatement of patriarchy in the modern age becomes justified by nationalism, anti-imperialism and the need to respect cultural and religious precedents inherited from the past" (Mehdid 1993, 10). Gendering the nation is hereby performed through the persistence of the patriarchal family, which is seen as the "cornerstone of the Arabo-Islamic cosmogony, its social organization and allocation of space" (Mehdid 1993, 32). Women's roles are mainly confined to the familial domestic realm. Addressing the issue of women's subordination, however, is controversial as it is seen by many as a threat to the sacred structure of the family, and as an intention to 'westernise' indigenous societies.

Therefore, in contrast to their active role during the anticolonial struggle,[39] the depiction of women as passive land or as active bearers of male nationalists has been predominant in many male-authored literary productions, in which:

> woman becomes an idea or spirit, that is denied reality and flesh, disincarnated
>
> or even derealized and her passivity becomes a requirement of the allegorical
>
> value bestowed on her. This reasoning means also that she becomes a-historical

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[39] For further reading on Palestinian women's engagement with the anticolonial struggle which goes back to their involvement with the struggle against British mandate, see Fleischmann (2003, 6-7). See also Sharoni (1995, 57); Hiltermann (1998, 41); Salibi (1993); Abdo (1994, 148); Glavanis-Grantham (1996, 173); Peteet (1991); Rubenberg (2001).

and invisible, paradoxically at a time when her active role is required by the movement of history (Mehdid 1993, 70).

In this way, Palestinian nationalist discourse has promoted an idealised symbolic vision of women. In nationalist literature, heroes and heroines are depicted as national icons embodying and working for the national cause. In this sentimental sense, the nation is defined as "a soul, a spiritual principle … the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion … a heroic past, great men … the common will in the present" (Bhabha 1990, 19). This image of ideal womanhood has fluctuated according to the level of women's involvement in the national struggle. For example, in early Palestinian literature, the image of the domestic woman who inhabits the private sphere is transformed into the image of the revolutionary comrade in some contemporary literature, reflecting women's entry into the public sphere.[40] In its nationalist agenda, literature aimed at promoting nationalism, ignoring the feminine-masculine struggle, thus, reflecting, at least in part, the existing power relations enforced in the Palestinian reality. "Gender issues" argues Tahboub (2009, 182), "especially in early Palestinian literature are presented in the traditional pattern of female followers and male leaders, females weakened by their femininity and males empowered by their masculinity, housewives and battlefield soldiers." Many male writers have constructed the archetype of women as the 'emblems of the nation'. In this context, the feminist struggle has been perceived as a foreign one in the Palestinian case. Julie Peteet (1991) argues that "the use of the term feminist in the Palestinian context can be problematic, as there is not a self-defined Palestinian feminist movement per se" (97). In fact, women's familial roles were rather emphasised and romanticised in early

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[40] Contemporary Palestinian history of anticolonial nationalist struggle has significantly influenced the shifting of female roles and depictions. Women have taken on greater roles and responsibilities, when, for example, their fathers and husbands were imprisoned or killed. Sustaining the family has entailed disrupting traditional gender roles.

Palestinian literature.[41] Thus, the role of a mother becomes the most important form of femininity from which two images evolve: the image of the mother and of the motherland. Tahboub (2009, 184) argues that such characterisation of women had no grey colours, as "it either elevates women to the status of motherhood, sainthood, and martyrdom or casts them out as immoral traitors to the cause, the Palestinian people and the country."

Mothers with their symbolic significance in Palestinian works of art birth the nation and nurture and educate its children.[42] One of the most important literary representations of the maternal icon is Ghassan Kanafani's novel *Umm Saad* (The mother of Saad). The narrative of *Umm Saad* is set miles away from Palestine in a refugee camp in Lebanon. During the first encounter with the narrator, Umm Saad plants in front of the narrator's door a dried-up shoot she has extracted from a vine tree; during the last encounter, the narrator notices that it has begun to sprout. The growth of the plant symbolises a growth in the national and political identity of Umm Saad, which develops from the peasant to revolutionary. The main thematic thread that runs through the diverse subject matter of the novel's nine episodes is the development of national and political consciousness in Umm Saad and the formation of her national identity. It is through the character of her son, Saad, that we are introduced to the identity of the revolutionary instead of the lamenting landless peasant. In the aftermath of the 1967 war, Saad joins the guerrillas and this event sets in motion the process of developing national consciousness, not only in his mother but in the rest of the camp. "Like Pelageya Vlasov in Maxim Gorky's *The Mother*, Umm

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[41] Early Palestinian literature after the Nakba concentrated on serving the "war effort", as it emphasised on "engineering the souls of its audience to unremittingly serve the cause". The themes of literature conveyed a sense "patriotic nostalgia, extreme didacticism, and unrelenting determination to return." Writers thus felt responsible to reflect and to respond to their historical reality and its tormented readers. This political reality produced some sort of committed art. Later, Kanafani termed this committed form of writing "resistance literature" (Tahboub 2009).

[42] Massad (1995) argues that in earlier national communiques of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising of 1987 (UNLU) and the PLO, women were viewed as the "weaker sex." In such nationalist communiques, women were listed "with occupational groups such as merchants, peasants, students, and workers," and in others they would only be mentioned alongside vulnerable groups, including the elderly and children. When later communiques started acknowledging women's roles in resistance, these communiques still insisted on their maternal roles, referring to them, for example, as "the thousands of women who miscarried as a result of poison gas and tear gas grenades, and those women whose sons and husbands were thrown in the Nazi prisons" (475).

Saad soon begins to grasp on her own the pervasive injustice and contradictions of life around her, as well as the imperative for political action to remedy that condition" (Siddiq 1984, 64). Umm Saad proudly announces that her son has joined the Fedayeen (the revolutionaries). She adds, "I wish I had ten like him. I'm tired, cousin. I've worn my life threadbare in that camp. … Twenty years have passed now, and if Saad doesn't go, who will?" (Kanafani 1999, 87) Kanafani's portrayal of Umm Saad transcends the literary character to represent his vision of what all Palestinian womanhood should be. Her gender identity is bound to her nationalist son. Umm Saad is described by the writer as the motherland. She is the "womb of the nation" who must transcend her biological instinct of maternal fear and protection for the sake of the national cause. Her national awareness is developed through her acceptance of her son's involvement in the national struggle. It is through her idealisation, through bestowing her with certain mythical purity, which purges her of her sexuality to elevate her to a certain prophetic status, that she is portrayed as the example of what a Palestinian woman should be:

> she rises from the womb of the earth, as an arrow held by mysterious destiny
> escalating endlessly… She walks high as a flag carried by unseen hands. … She
> is solid as a rock, patient as a prophet. She has grown ten years older trying to
> win clean bread for her family (Kanafani 1999, 15–16, 25).

This literary vision of women dictates that women's place and role in Palestinian society has to match and support the quest for national aspiration and liberation from colonial rule. Umm Saad, the literary character, becomes "an example to all succeeding writers, and women characters have subsequently been weighed in relation to Umm Saad on a scale of resemblance or dissimilarity" (Tahboub 2009, 186).

Palestinian women writers have struggled to deconstruct such a nationalist discourse that has reduced women to symbols, though some other writers have used narrative to protest their

framing by patriarchal symbols of the whole nation. These women writers have, therefore, had to negotiate their roles within the larger national narrative that "assigns Woman a fixed role as an historical metaphor buried deep within the foundations of the narrative" (Fayad, 1995). In her novel *Wild Thorns*, Sahar Khalifeh (1985, 176) writes:

> Wake up, clever boy. I'm not the mother of the land or the symbol. I am a person.
> I eat, drink, dream, make mistakes, get lost, get agitated, suffer, and talk to the
> wind. I'm not a symbol, I'm a woman.

The glorification of Palestinian women in artistic representations and repeated attempts to connect them to the land have accorded womanhood symbolic significance as nationhood, the preservation of customs, tradition, ethics and culture, and submission to the established masculine family codes, on which a woman finds herself dependent (Jacoby 1999, 514).

The above overview of women's representation in the Palestinian nationalist intertexts provides just some examples of the ways Palestinian women are written as emblems of the nation. In this sense, the image of the colonised woman has been inscribed in similar ways by both the coloniser and the national male figure. The making of the Palestinian female subject as oriental was performed by a colonial Western discourse, which sees Palestinian women in terms of their Arabo-Muslim culture depicting them as the subordinate mysterious other. The effect of such discourse is still prominently dominant in the representation of women by Western media. Similarly, the portrayal of women in Palestinian national literature and cultural production and the allocation of their roles throughout the anticolonial national struggle have also orientalised women through largely idealised, static gendered representations. It is conceivable that the national struggle might have afforded Palestinian women the opportunity to undermine traditional gender inequities and patriarchal values as it allowed them to be visible in the revolutionary pursuit of a lost land and nation, a space previously regarded as an exclusively

male domain. However, such roles have tended to confine women by entrapping them in a pre-colonial patriarchal past, turning them into symbols of the nation, and submerging their individual identity in the collective national vision. In this context, then, the significance of feminism to operate as a major socio-political force within the postcolonial world, even where colonialism, its forces and mechanisms are still in place, remains critical.

Women at the Crossroads

Allocating the Feminist within Third-World Nationalism

The tense relationship between anticolonial third-world nationalism and feminism has ignited several debates within postcolonial feminist theory. Feminism in most third-world contexts has been viewed by nationalists with suspicion as a doubtful first-world invention, a threatening modernist intrusion, or a colonial and oriental conspiracy.[43] The past three decades, however, have witnessed a wave of scholarly attempts at decolonising the field of feminism, especially in relation to issues of race, class and, most importantly, nationalism; see for example (Enloe 1990; McClintock 1995; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Andrade 2007; Boehmer 2005). There has also been significant research on the tense relationship between nationalism and feminism in the Arabo-Muslim context, in particular. For example, scholars such as Leila Ahmed (1992, 167) explain that such suspicion towards feminism is the result of a long colonial past accompanied by a European colonialist tendency to use female emancipation to legitimise economic and geographical control. Colonial feminism, according to Ahmed (1992), worked within a discourse of colonial domination over the Arab and Muslim 'other', whose 'backward' native culture was seen as intrinsic to women's conditions. This colonial approach to feminism

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[43] Heng (1997, 34) argues that in most third- world contexts, 'feminism' was seen as an import from the West, and as a case of Western imperialism which contradicts with nationalist agendas.

suggested that the progress of third-world women's status was only possible if they abandoned their cultural identity. Other postcolonial feminist scholars have examined the distinct forms of Arab and Muslim feminisms and the feminist voices that already existed as social movements and as narratives of resistance across the Middle-East, and established itself within that colonial past as indigenous to Arab cultures.[44] Therefore, feminism, seen as primarily about Tahrir-almara'a, women's liberation, was disregarded as a colonial conspiracy directed against women, whom the nation perceives as the authentic embodiment of its national, cultural and religious essence.[45]

A reconfiguration of a rather colonial approach to feminism was introduced during the second wave of feminism which took on the notion of "global sisterhood". The premise of global feminism has been cast by postcolonial feminists as marginalising people of colour through the movement's disregard of central issues that relate to their contexts, and to which they project their resistance; most importantly are the issues of colonialism and race. Lina Sunseri (2000, 144) argues that "'third world' women have felt alienated by what they view as a 'western feminist' movement that has either marginalised them or not accurately represented their experiences and interests".[46] For example, Robin Morgan's authoritative anthology *Sisterhood*

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[44] For example, see Moore (2008); Badran and cooke (1990).

[45] This antagonistic attitude towards colonial feminism does not mean, however, that feminism, in its various forms, was absent across the Arab world. See, for example, Salma Jayyusi's (2002) prolonged discussion of Arab feminist writers such as Syrian Nazira Zaineddin, Egyptian Durriya Shafik and Iraqi Nazik al-Malaika. These women's vigorous writing and activism early in the twentieth century speaks of a long history of women's efforts to advocate and demand their rights. It is also an example of these women writers' struggle with their respective nationalisms as well as with the implication of colonialism on women's deteriorating status in the Middle East. It was Durriya Shafik who declared, "The Woman! A nation cannot be liberated whether internally or externally without its woman." (Nelson cited in Jayyusi 2002, 18). Fleischmann (1996) notes that in Palestine, the "woman question" did not initially attract the level of attention it did in Egypt at the onset of the twentieth century. However, over time, and around the 1920s in particular, discussions of the woman question were increasingly appearing in the national press, and women were participating in these debates. One such example of newspaper coverage includes *Filastin*, which was considered "the only Palestinian newspaper to span the period of so many different foreign rules" of Palestine. Later, *Filastin* added a women's page, in which Asma Tubi, one of the renowned women journalists in Palestine during this period, wrote a column entitled, "Nisa'iyyat" (Women's Affairs). By the 1920s and 1930s, coverage of women in papers such as *Filasttn*, *Miraat al-Sharq*, and al-*Karmil* consisted of thematic and analytical articles.

[46] For example, Spivak (1981, 184) argues that there is a certain "inbuilt colonialism of first-world feminism toward the third." Such colonial tendency is clear in the universal claim of "global sisterhood" which are claimed

is Global (1984), according to Mohanty (1992,78), "proclaim[ed] itself as the anthology of *the* international women's movement": a text that charged that women all over the world, regardless of their class, ethnicity, nationality, or religion, were victims of a universal patriarchy. The text has been critiqued by many third-world feminists as problematic; however, it did demonstrate the degree to which texts and narratives, even those with well-intentioned feminist views, might become tools for legitimising cultural imperialism. Such culturally insensitive views of feminism have dominated most of the western discourse produced on third-world women since then, reiterating the need to "rescue" these women from patriarchy as its sole form of oppression. These universal views of feminism also controlled most international interventions to 'empower' these women in such contexts. Therefore, though such feminist views now seem outdated, they have imposed and sustained a certain hegemony which still directs many western-authored representations of third-world women today.

So how do we situate the feminist both as she relates to third-world women in general and to Palestinian women bloggers in particular? A brief overview of Mohanty's critique of Morgan's *Sisterhood is Global*, which aims at decolonising feminist theory from such universalising tendencies, and posits feminism as a political stance, and as a politics of engagement, is central to this thesis's reading of blogging itself as a political feminist act.

In her critique of Morgan's proposition of global feminism and universal sisterhood, Mohanty (1992) stresses the importance of locating the category of gender alongside other significant categories of difference, including race, class, and nation, which is crucial for most third-world nations whose 'location' results in multiple forms of oppression. Mohanty (1992, 74) defines the politics of location as "the historical, geographical, cultural, psychic and imaginative boundaries which provide the ground for political definition and self-definition," suggesting that "historicizing and locating political agency is a necessary alternative to formulations of the

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by some first-world feminists, whose discourse thus functions in a similar manner to the "colonial rescue fantasy" of non-western women.

'universality' of gendered oppression and struggles" (75). Like her third-world feminist counterparts, Mohanty is very critical of the "universalizing" notions of "the woman experience" which sets the category of "woman" as one "cross-culturally singular, homogenous group with the same interests, perspectives, and goals and similar experiences" (78), victimised by the same patriarchal struggle. To achieve this sameness of experience, other categories have to be muted as a result (race and nation, for example). This, in effect, results in erasing the history of imperialism, and eroding material and ideological power differences within groups of women, especially between those in the first and the third worlds. Mohanty thus rejects the tendency to situate "woman" as a category outside of "history" which, according to Morgan, is solely male constructed.

Mohanty also criticises Morgan's conflation of the "female experience": being born as a female, with feminism. Being female does not naturally translate to one being a feminist, and Mohanty calls such conflation "the feminist osmosis thesis." Feminism is a conscious, political act which means an ongoing direct engagement with history. Therefore, instead of Morgan's proposition on feminism as a politics of transcendence, which assumes "women" as an ahistorical group, whose only way out of a world where "men make history" is to transcend patriarchal political history, Mohanty calls for a politics of engagement, proposing "a war of position … that is re-entering into the mainstream in order to challenge it on its own terms," therefore, crossing those borders rather than transcending them. For Mohanty (1992), feminism defines itself as:

> a political instance, not merely a sexual politics but a politics of everyday life,
> which later … enters the public sphere of expression and creative practice,
> displacing aesthetic hierarchies and generic categories, and thus establishes the
> semiotic ground for a different production of reference and meaning (84).

Ella Shohat (1997) terms such a position "Post-Third-Worldist Feminism," (PTWF) a political form of feminism that results from the ongoing engagement in anticolonial struggle in third-world nationalism. PTWF rejects both Eurocentric approaches to feminism as global, which means erasing actual and ideological power structures, as well as its ahistorical postulation, which means writing women out as active social actors in colonial and imperialist history. PTWF also stands in opposition to anticolonial nationalist struggles in its current form, and it "assumes the validity of the anticolonial movement, but also interrogates the divisions that rend the Third-World nation."

Mohanty and Shohat's respective approaches to feminism have significantly influenced the way I interpret the act of blogging in the Palestinian context, and their work informs my feminist reading of the blogs themselves as creative narratives. Their approach to feminism as a politics of engagement relates to blogging itself in the Palestinian context as a conscious political act that results from women's daily engagement with history. Palestinian women bloggers choose to leave the historically silenced private sphere in order to make public some of these private daily experiences, and this move resonates with Mohanty's definition of feminism as the politics of the everyday entering the sphere of expression.

Thus, the feminist critique applied in the analysis of the online narratives of Palestinian women bloggers takes as its primary concern both location and experience in its discussion of women's experience in Palestine in its current national context of colonialism. Attempts at deconstructing traditional nationalist narratives are not new nor are they exclusive to the narrative of online blogs. Creative forms have found other platforms, such as literature and cinema, where Palestinian creative practitioners have harnessed different means to articulate, protest, and offer alternative imagery. Blogs, however, with their potential to make visible the 'everyday' narratives of ordinary Palestinians, also make accessible to a larger readership the discussion

of issues explored here through the creative articulation of Palestinian women bloggers' lived experiences.

Chapter 4.   Negotiating National Allegories

In this chapter, I aim to read the selected blogs of two Palestinian female bloggers (Lina Al-Sharif and Mariam Barghouti) as national narratives or what Frederic Jameson refers to as "national allegories" (1986). Whereas Jameson's notion has mostly been discussed in relation to the novel, I make a case for blogs as urgent mediums of self-representation in times of crisis, where the blogs respond to the political urgency of representing extreme injustice and suffering. They are, I explain, potentially crucial sites for the development of national allegories. As is the case with most texts written by Palestinian bloggers, through the personal narratives of the writers (Lina and Mariam), the larger story of the nation is also narrated. This resonates with Jameson's idea of the inevitable relation between the private and the public, and the personal and the national in texts produced within third-world contexts. By employing Jameson's notion of national allegory as both a writing and a reading practice, I argue that national allegories have a political function and, moreover, that, as we see in the blogs, there is a subversive potential in their ability to convey the unavoidable tension between feminism and nationalism.

Lina writes a blog entitled "Reflections on Motherhood, Motherland, and Poetry". In 2007, Lina started the blog as a platform in which she narrates her everyday reality in Gaza under the siege. In her earlier narratives, Lina mainly aimed at humanising Gaza by giving an alternative image of the Gaza Strip to a global readership, an image that is different to the mainstream representation of Gaza as a Hamas-governed enclave. On her blog, Lina expresses herself through different media including image, video, diary-style entries, but most prominently through poetry. The pairing of both motherhood and motherland in the title of her blog speaks to the poetic voice which she creates, one that is preoccupied with narrating the nation as "the motherland," but also the voice of a Palestinian woman, who later becomes a mother. Through her poetic voice, Lina questions her symbolic location within nationalist narratives. Her blog

opens up an important space for negotiating her multiple belongings as a Palestinian, Arab Muslim woman, and aspiring poet.

Mariam's blogs are records of her personal experiences of colonialism and its underpinning by violence. She is directly engaged in the anticolonial struggle through her role as an activist, taking part in anti-occupation activism, especially the Nabi Saleh protests.[47] In this sense, her online narratives correspond to Jameson's notion of national allegories, especially as urgent narratives, resulting from direct experiences of oppression. Mariam's blogs document events, such as her first-hand witnessing of the death of friends and family or intense colonial encounters. The narratives produced as a result of these experiences often grapple with how to represent these unnecessary deaths. The tension resulting from the presence of both heroic representations and Mariam's attempts at deconstructing those heroic images speaks to the complexity of the position from which she writes, as a woman, one where issues of nationalism, colonialism, orientalism, and gender intersect.

By writing national allegories, Lina and Mariam choose to take part in the collective narrative of the nation, consciously writing of a Palestinian collective reality in which they locate their own voices. In light of the allegorical gendered representations of women in nationalist narratives discussed in Chapter Three, I read some of Lina's lyrical blogs, addressing the ways she employs these poetic narratives to address women's symbolic representation, by accepting, refusing, or deriding the allegory. In reading Mariam's blogs, I mainly focus on her interest in the gendered archetypes of heroic representations of women, and I trace how, as a blogger,

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[47] Nabi Saleh is a village in the West Bank, with a population of under a thousand Palestinians. The village has been constantly under attack by day and night raid, and its residents face the constant threat of the confiscation of their lands and olive groves. Hundreds of dunums of Nabi Saleh's lands have been confiscated for the purpose of building the illegal settlement of Halamish. In 2009, Israel confiscated the village's only water spring to be used by the Israeli settlers. The residents of Nabi Saleh along solidarity groups and individuals started a nonviolent weekly protest against the ethnic cleansing of their village in 2010.

Mariam sometimes takes part in reproducing this mythological allegory, rethinks this approach in other blogs, and then produces alternative imagery in yet others.

National Allegories and Postcolonial Theory

In a 1986 essay entitled "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", Jameson, developing a theory for reading third-world literature, makes the point that this literature can be previewed as an allegory of emerging national situations. He explains that "third-world texts project a political dimension in the form of national allegory," where "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation for the public third-world culture and society" (1986, 69). In an attempt to argue for what all third-world literature has in common and what distinguishes it radically from "analogous cultural forms" (69) in the first world, Jameson argues that "all third world texts are necessarily … allegorical: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel" (69). He concludes his essay arguing for "the allegorical nature of third-world culture, where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself" (1986, 69).

Jameson notion of national allegory has received severe criticism for its apparent "desire for generality" (Szeman 2001, 189). Its tendency towards generalising the diversity of third-world literary production under a certain category was described as "a patronizing, theoretical orientalism, or as yet another example of a troubling appropriation of Otherness with the aim of exploring the West rather than the Other" (Szeman 2001, 189). For many postcolonial theorists, his postulation of national allegories has not only been perceived as "monolithic" but also as "colonialist", as well as connoting a "rhetoric of otherness;" thus, these critiques

undermine the relevance of national allegory as a means of literary interpretation. It was Aijaz Ahmad (1987) whose postcolonial critique of Jameson's assumption first described his text as "*colonialist* in character and tendency" (Lazarus 2011, 93; emphasis in original). For Ahmad, Jameson's theoretical generalisation and his attempts at describing the literary production of what he calls the "Third World" seemed absurd, especially with the tendency to make sweeping claims in relation to third-world texts.[48]

Jameson was aware of the reductionism that might result from utilising such a term as "third world". He openly declares in the introduction to his essay that "it is presumptuous to offer some general theory of what is often called third-world literature, given the enormous variety both of national cultures in the third world and of specific historical trajectories in each of those areas" (Jameson 1986, 68). Nonetheless, he retains the term in the absence of one capable of depicting the structure of the contemporary world order.

However, the connection between the concept of national allegory and postcolonial studies does not end in its dismissal by postcolonialists such as Ahmad. In fact, many theorists have argued for the significance of national allegory as a theory of reading, corresponding thus to postcolonial theory's interest in reading and reception as "one of the field's earliest points of reference" (Bernard 2011, 78). For example, in *Rhetorics of Belonging* Anna Bernard (2013) provides a defence of national allegory and argues for its dual significance as both reading and a writing practice which is "not exhausted, but rather left seriously incomplete" (2013, 8).

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[48] Ahmad (1992), a postcolonial theorist of Indian and Pakistani origin, interprets Jameson's attempt from a subjective position by stating that "I realized that what was being theorized was, among many other things, myself" calling Jameson "my civilizational Other" (96). However, in his attempt to shed light on the assumed colonialist underpinnings of Jameson's essay, Ahmad's critique itself becomes an example of Jameson's third-world allegorical writing. Ahmad's interpretation of Jameson's third world in relation to himself on the private individual level reflects Jameson's claim that "in Third World situation the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual" (Jameson 1986, 74).

Jameson imagines the reception or response of a "hypothetical first-world reader" to third-world texts. Because such a hypothetical first-world reader "has been taught to affirm a 'radical split' between poetics and politics" (1986, 69), his reading of third-world texts is limited by the "political and aesthetic horizons of his or her education and experience" (Jameson 1986, 69). Bernard (2011, 79) argues that "it is also not surprising that the reader with limited knowledge or experience of this kind of political desire [on the part of third-world writers] and with entrenched ideas about literature's affirmation of the personal and intimate, would find its artistic expression difficult to read as 'literature.'" For this reader, third-world texts might even read as "conventional or naïve" (Jameson 1986, 69). In response to such a view, Bernard argues that the idea that third-world texts might seem accessible and already known to the first-world reader runs contrary to what Jameson's claims in relation to national allegory. Therefore, national allegories as a reading practice does not imply a monolithic or a reductive reading of third-world texts. Bernard (2013, 24) argues:

> If the 'nation' in national allegory names the very possibility of imagining social relations (Szeman, 2001, 166), then far from producing national allegories, a text's transmission across 'difference' shows how poorly equipped the 'first-world' reader is to engage with the literary representation of collectivity.

Jameson argues that third-world texts present to first-world readers "a freshness of information and social interest that we cannot share" (Jameson 1986, 66). Therefore, reading them requires acknowledging the existence of other "unfamiliar and therefore frightening" (Jameson 1986, 66) situations beyond their own experience.

Regarding national allegories as a writing practice, Bernard (2011) assumes that in such conditions where the political aspiration for nationhood is held in common, the writer intends to represent such national desire. She also argues that national allegories thus constitute a

writing practice and claims that there is a "structural tendency" that informs literary production in places like Israel and Palestine "where the desire for an as-yet unrealized national liberation defines and determines everyday experiences" (Bernard 2013, 24) so that these texts function

> as texts whose writers actively expect and exploit the reception of their work as a document of the conflict, using their status as 'world' writers to authorize, in the most literal sense of the word, their accounts of the region's history and their visions of its political future (Bernard 2013, 5).

Similarly, Jameson's concept of "national allegories" in opposition to the "unconscious political allegories of modern and contemporary first world literature," are "conscious and overt" (Bernard 2011, 79). They are intentionally and explicitly written (allegories as a writing practice) to represent a national dilemma by the writer.

Palestinian Women's Blogs as National Allegories

In Bernard's reclamation of Jameson's national allegories for reading Palestinian/Israeli literary production, she focuses on the novel, in line with Bhabha and Anderson, who argue for the novel as the ultimate form of national narratives. But Bernard also admits to the novel being an elitist form of narrative. In this chapter, I do not aim to devalue the significance of the novel and its suitability for national narration; rather, I make a case for blogs as a distinctly valuable, contemporary and accessible form of narrative, which respond in an immediate and timely way to the everyday need to write back and to represent the nation. That is particularly apparent in contexts where freedom of speech/representation and expression are not assured or given, such as the case in Palestine. In this sense, blogs, both as narratives and as spaces allowing for narratives to emerge, become an important response to the national need for self-representation, and they expand on Said's idea of the permission to narrate (1984).

Ahdaf Soueif (2012) argues that in such times of national crisis, the need for an immediate voice to speak truth produces alternative forms of narratives, which have recently been deployed through the utilisation of social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. Soueif (2012) writes during the Egyptian revolution:

> Attempts at fiction right now would be too simple. The immediate truth is too glaring to allow a more subtle truth to take form. For reality has to take time to be processed, to transform into fiction. So it's no use a story presenting itself, tempting, asking to be written, because another story will – in the next minute – come roaring over it, making the same demand. And you, the novelist, can't grab one of them and run away and lock yourself up with it and surrender to it and wait and work for the transformation to happen – because you, the citizen, need to be present, there, on the ground, marching, supporting, talking, instigating, articulating. Your talent – at the time of crisis – is to tell the stories as they are, to help them to achieve power as reality not as fiction.

Ahdaf's argument is situated within a time when the online platform was gaining considerable momentum, especially with the recent developments in the Arab region where authoritarian regimes have been toppled by activists, and where the internet has been perceived as one of the most powerful means of mobilising public support in the fight against repression and dominant restrictive narratives.[49] Her argument addresses a certain historical moment when the writer is also the activist, but it particularly speaks of the significance of these recent mediums of self-

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[49] Soueif's article in *The Guardian* was written in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution. The piece was a result of her direct engagement with the revolution in Egypt, which represents a specific historical event in the Arab world. However, the issue of the writer as the activist and the urgency of nationalist narratives in times of national crises has preoccupied many Palestinian writers, including Ghassan Kanafani and Mahmoud Darwish. In 2008, addressing the first Palestine Festival of Literature, Darwish raises the question of the writer who "has to use the word to resist the military occupation, and has to resist – on behalf of the word – the danger of the banal and the repetitive." Darwish also asks, "how can the poet achieve literary freedom in such mindless conditions? And how can the poet preserve the literariness of literature in such ruthless times? (Darwish 2008 cited in Payne 2017).

representation at times of national crises. The voices of Palestinian bloggers speak of a similarly urgent need for a voice to represent the structural forms of everyday oppression. For example, Mariam is a Palestinian activist residing in the West Bank. Her blog, entitled "Ramallah Bantustan", is a record of her on-the-ground political activism. On the reasons she started blogging, Mariam (December 2013) writes:

> These past two years I, like many active Palestinians, have become accustomed to reporting what happens on the ground. Whether we use social media or take notes to write articles later on, the idea of reporting stays with us as we take part in many actions on the ground. We report to have a record of what happens on the ground, since the mainstream media has adopted the Zionist narrative, we become civilian journalists. Like possessing a split personality, we simultaneously internalize the personality of a reporter and that of angry Palestinians voicing their discontent with the status quo.

This pressing need to project a voice—one that reports and resists—characterises most of the blogs written by Palestinian women. It is at those times of crisis that platforms such as blogs have been used as political tools to create a narrative of urgency. Therefore, Jameson's notion of national allegories proves useful to the analysis of Palestinian online narratives I select in terms of its consideration of the urgent need for a voice to speak/write on behalf of the oppressed. Most of the blogs explored in this thesis are written as an immediate reflection on urgent situations of oppression or response of resistance to the colonial presence. Moreover, the individual narrative of each female blogger, mainly the expression of personal experiences, cannot be detached from the larger political context in which they are writing. As a result, these blogs turn into "paradigmatic records of the circumstances of many other people who live in

the same period" (Makhatheni 1993, 18). The blogs can therefore be considered national allegories in the sense proposed by Jameson.

Jameson's notion of national allegories has been criticised for its tendency towards homogenising the colonised and oppressed into one undifferentiated group. However, in the Palestinian context, where a more urgent discourse is required in order to communicate the daily oppression imposed on the collective, such concern over homogenisation is overridden by the immediate need for a voice that speaks for that collective. Because a great deal of Palestinian writing struggles to come to terms with the daily practices and experiences of colonial oppression, Palestinian narratives can align with Jameson's notion of "the hurt of history" (1981, 273): that is, an urgent need to communicate "trauerarbeit" or mourning, "a necessary and inevitable part of any longer-term process of historical recovery" (Cleary 2002, 193). Joe Cleary (2002, 193) suggests that "political calamity of the magnitude suffered by the Palestinians inevitably exerts an enormous human toll; it induces a sense of individual and collective humiliation, frustration, recrimination, rage, anomie and despair." In this context, online blogs become an important means of representing a communal sense of oppression through the personal space that is the blogs.

The Gendered Voice in National Allegories

In reading the blog narratives of Palestinian women writing the nation in this thesis, I examine the ways in which the aspiration of the collective intersects with subjective voices within this collective, including the voices of women. Bernard (2013) argues that women writers in Palestine and Israel, as examples of women writing within intense national conflicts, expect a certain domestic and international reception of their writing as women. First, there is the international interest in voices of women as victims of war, perpetrated by men. Such gender-attentive reading, according to Bernard, leads to erasing the significance and the priority of the

nation as an important social and political aspiration of the women of the nation, and their desires for the nation, both as individuals and as part of the collective. These readings see women as helpless victims of a universal patriarchy, or women's oppression as evidence of the "sexism of Arab-Islamic culture" (Bernard 2013, 116), thus, dismissing women's historical condition, and their colonised status. In her reading of literary production by Arab women, Anastasia Valassopoulos (2008, 16) points out that the pre-assigned and homogenous reading and reception of Arab women's writing as evidence and "affirmation of oppression" is a challenge to the women writers themselves. Bernard (2013, 117), commenting on these metropolitan gender-based readings, states:

> The trouble with these kinds of gender-attentive readings is that even when they are used, commendably, to challenge ideas of the nation that relegate women to reproductive or symbolic roles, they fail to acknowledge the nation's status as the principal political desire of Palestinian and Israeli life … [I]t is extremely difficult to separate the demand for gender equality from the demand for national self-determination; the nation remains the framework within which the struggle for women's liberation will necessarily take place.

Simultaneously, through their writing, many Palestinian women writers, argues Bernard, also respond to the expectations of a domestic and national readership, which count on writers putting the national question first and, consequently, silencing women's issues. Thus, for these Palestinian women, writing comes as a feminist engagement challenging the myth of putting the nation's interest first.

While understanding Bernard's concern over the gender-attentive reading of women writing within national contexts, especially in the cases of Palestine and Israel, I see Bernard's statement as a demand to read women's writing without failing to see the significance of the

national context from which they write and to address such writing in its historical context. Therefore, a gender-attentive reading of these writings by women allows us to see how women speak and write back to the hierarchies of power that influence their writing in such spaces. This highlights the importance of reading these narratives as national allegories, for such a reading acknowledges the significance of the nation and the national question, but does not erase the gendered voice. Therefore, my reflection on the blogs of Lina and Mariam, who choose to place their gendered voices at the centre of their national narratives, explores the ways the collective voice of the nation intersects with the feminist concerns of women writers.

Writing National Allegories

Live from Gaza: Reflections on Motherhood, Motherland, and Poetry.

"I feel that I discovered my voice between the digits of these electronic pages, so it's so much like a small note where I write a blend of the heartily minded digests of my life" Lina Al-Sharif (2011).

Lina started her personal blog, entitled "Live from Gaza," in 2007, while an English Literature student in Gaza. Moving to Qatar to start a family in 2011, and after becoming a mother, Lina changed the title of the blog to "Reflections on Motherhood, Motherland, and Poetry." The blog started with diary-style entries as day-to-day narratives about life under the siege in Gaza, and it offered an alternative space to the confined reality in which Lina lived since the siege started. In her first blog entry in 2007, Lina writes in what was then her broken English, "This blog is basically about Gaza [,] my hometown ... from my point view. In this blog I'm going to show you the real life in Gaza regardless [of] the political situation though it will be so hard to ignore."

Lina's blog itself becomes a space floating between the private and the public, the personal and the political, the individual and the national. On the one hand, her insistence on using English,

not her mother tongue, speaks of a need to employ a global language when using this public platform to reach out to a global readership. She employs the blog space to produce a narrative of self-representation as an alternative to mainstream representation (as indicated by her reference to "from my point of view" and "show the real life in Gaza"). Thus, she addresses the need for these urgent voices to speak via global platforms and to present an alternative image to that presented in the news about Palestine. In this sense, Lina voluntarily takes part in the mission of narrating the nation. She turns her personal voice into the voice of the collective, writing a national allegory in the process, where her individual story as a woman who lives in this besieged space translates into the collective story of her people living within that historical moment.

The blog moves between diary entries of day-to-day occurrences, images and videos of everyday life in Gaza; most importantly, this blog experiments with poetry. Readers can scroll down the homepage to read Lina's first attempts at writing poetry, where her own voice is overridden by her attempt to write the space in which she lived. Living through the isolation resulting from the blockade on the Gaza Strip, Lina's first posts were directed at the human toll and suffering which the siege has imposed on her and other Palestinians in Gaza. In her post entitled, "Nothing is Real," Lina (January 2010) writes about this space, portraying a sense of suffocation and hopelessness that resonates with her own physical confinement. She writes:

prison inside a prison in a prison

where the air is not to breathe

wall around a wall under a wall

the bottomless is within reach

Later, Lina's concern with her identity becomes more prominent in her lyrical blogs. Readers can thus see the transformation resulting from her experimentation with poetic form and her exploration of the different facets of her experience, which goes beyond national concerns. In later posts, she questions her location within the struggle and within the narratives produced in this space, criticising the way she has been represented, and confined by representation, using poetry as a medium of self-expression.

The following selected poems from Lina's blog not only fit into Jameson's notion of national allegory both as a reading and as a writing practice and as the story of the individual which is also a story of the nation, but their gendered voice is also central to their significance as poetic meaning. In a blog post entitled "Dear Western Journalists" (January 2017), Lina writes this narrative poem:

Dear Western journalists,
you come from you far away lands
offering to uncover my secrets
you cite your resources:
ban the Burqa subway ads
Jasmine from Aladdin
and a few harem paintings
found in your local museum

You are covering my cover
asking me why I'm all covered
your father is making you?
your brother is threatening you?
your husband is forcing you?
I see your prejudice tucked
under your coverage

Dear Western journalists*,*

I look for your coverage

while I am covered with the rubble of my house

while I am covering my children in shrouds

I find your words covering up the truth

for the people who got you covered

all because it's 'unbiased coverage'

Dear Arab journalists,

you want to cover my mouth

telling me *I'm swimming in an ocean of sharks*

warning me to *go back to land or be ripped apart*

I'm taking off the veils that cover your brains

I'm not whitewashing your cover

that's my blood spewed on sheets and streets

I cover my stories

I am writing these reports.[50]

Aware of her western readership and pre-empting orientalist representations of her gendered identity, Lina is addressing the question of writing as a woman in occupied spaces. In the first stanza, by using the second-person pronoun "you," and directly speaking to the western reader, Lina, as both reader and writer, is confronting the way she is read and written by others. She is also resisting what she perceives as an essentialist reading of her gendered identity, a reading that resonates with the "western rescue fantasy" (referred to in Chapter Three) of the oppressed Arab Muslim woman suffering the oppression of patriarchy, negating any sense of her agency.

Through the play on the word "cover" and its different connotations, Lina is thus able to speak back to (most probably) the only way she is read and written by western readership and representation. Through repeated use of the base word "cover", and its variations produced

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[50] Permission to reproduce the poem in the thesis has been given by the author.

through the addition of prefixes or suffixes – "uncover" and "coverage" – Lina is speaking back to orientalist images of covered, or uncovered, Arab and Muslim women as well as the practice of media coverage. This is also why she refers to "Jasmine from Aladdin" as an iconic image of exoticism and one of the main references to Arab women in the western imagination: the full cover of the burqa or the alternative image of the sexualised figure of Jasmine. The media coverage plays on colonial desires to expose what Nima Naghibi (2009, 81) discusses as "the simultaneously eroticized and abject Muslim woman." Lina highlights this image of abjection, by repeating Western statements that depict Arab and Muslim women as submissive objects of the familial male authority who are assumed to "force", "threaten", or "make" women cover up. This speaks to the idea that women in orientalist discourse are often portrayed as they are in nationalist narratives, where their identity is typically linked (in subordinate relation) to a familial male figure.

Here, Lina also objects to orientalist discourses that dismiss what miriam cooke (2004, 59) calls the "multiple belongings" of Muslim women (whether that belonging is to a religious, political, national, or gendered identity). The western media coverage of Arab Muslim women, which Lina refers to in her poem, often conceals the diverse means of negotiation that Muslim women employ as they address their faith and gender commitments (cooke 2004, 59). Lina is speaking back to the monolithic mode in which people in the west have tended to interpret women's diverse forms of veiling and covering as a sign of their oppression, thus denying them any agency. This western hegemonic story of the veil has repeatedly been contested by Islamic feminist and postcolonial scholars, including Lila Abu-Lughod (1998, 14-15); cooke (2004, x); and Saba Mahmoud (2011, 15-16) who have documented how in different contexts and locations of the Islamic world, women have willingly donned the veil as a sign of their political and cultural identity.

In the second stanza, Lina complicates the idea of representation as she addresses her own concrete national situation and, thus, her "multiple belongings". Lina moves from her gendered identity as an Arab Muslim woman to her concern with national representations: from the depiction of her story as an individual woman to the public story of the suffering of her people. In this stanza, the individual "I" takes on the figurative role of representing those "covered with the rubble" under their houses; thus, the "I" stands in for the collective. Therefore, in the absence of a narrative to represent Palestinians' collective suffering to a global audience, the story of the nation becomes a more prominent concern. The "unbiased coverage" of the western media leaves many stories untold and the 'truth', as she sees it, largely absent. There is a sense of urgency that the images of "rubble" and "shrouds" evoke, revealing a certain urgent national narrative that needs to surface. Lina's reference to "my children" replicates the allegorical image of the motherland, for the children of the nation are all her children. The images invoked in these lines may speak to certain times in Lina's personal life when she has experienced war and its devastating implications. These times of intense suffering when, regardless of age or gender, one's life is at stake, necessitate the telling of the national story, and addressing the material reality of the nation. In these two stanzas, Lina's poetic voice addresses a western readership where a personal inflection is self-consciously made political and the individual merges with the collective. However, Lina does not end her poem by prioritising the national story, and dismissing her own individual story as a woman. In the final stanza of the poem, she moves to address a national readership.

Here, Lina further complicates the idea of women writing in occupied spaces by her bold, rhetorical address to Arab journalists, addressing their privileging of the national cause, and thereby restricting her voice as a woman "warning me 'go back to land.'" Her mention of the ocean of sharks could be a reference to her participation in the nationalist struggle, its attendant narrative, and her daring to enter the sphere of public commentary. But just because she is

taking part in the writing of the story of the nation does not mean she will "whitewash" it. Lina uses this expression of 'whitewashing' to refuse the idea of the nation as a sacrosanct concept that is beyond questioning. In this sense, Lina is trying to speak of the position from which she is writing as private and public subject, witness to "blood spilled on sheets and streets", and to speak back to the multi-dimensional facets of oppressive narratives, whether those are orientalist or nationalist. This is particularly clear in the last two lines of the poem, where Lina emphasises her identity as a writer and on the importance of owning her own story.

Refusing National Allegory

If Palestinian women are mostly portrayed through allegorical means in the service of the national discourse, as explained earlier in the thesis, can national allegory itself be used as a subversive discourse to challenge the subsuming of women's identity to that allegory? And, if so, how can the use of national allegories advance a postcolonial feminist reading of women's blogs? As we saw above, Lina ends "Dear Western Journalists" with the significance of writing in articulating her multiple belongings as a Palestinian Muslim woman. In another blogpost entitled "What I Know", Lina also highlights her struggle as a poet who is expected to write national poetry, which risks confining her voice to reproducing the clichéd rhetoric of banal symbolism. Lina (September 2013) writes:

Write what you know…

I know that I am a Palestinian,

I know that clichés reside in my rhetoric

That olive tree, that dove of peace

that Gandhi they preach

all the talk about the steadfastness of refugees,

this steadfastness is imposed on me

like a curfew…

and that rock that I threw

it was because I was angry

about that young blue-eyed solider

who told me in his American accent: "No entry!"

This refugee camp is like a swamp.

Don't want you to fix the water tap,

don't want you to fix electricity grid

I want this to end

And I don't want you to use me as your slogan

in the next conference you attend

I don't want to be a symbol,

nor consider a short visit to my besieged city symbolic

nor cherish the key of my grandma for its symbolism…

I don't want to live in a memory

A story of a great tragedy

A memory eroding by apathy,

I don't want your bubble,

Don't throw your NGO money on the problem,

It won't go…

You are safe

save your dignity,

save your ingenuity.

Don't talk to me about a featureless state,

Look at my state,

There's a country I want to retake…

I don't want to keep writing poetry

inspired by dispossessed, imprisoned, oppressed muses

Who shed words to heal my bruises.

I want to see the sea for what it is

and marvel the sunset

without a permit,

without a time limit,

without feeling that I am fulfilling a promise.[51]

In this poem, Lina creates a poetic persona that reflects on the dilemmas of writing poetry as a Palestinian woman. Here, the persona is convinced that writing experience of "what you know"—an act that Lina engages in every time she writes from her own experience and perspective on her blog—means centralising her national identity: "I know that I am a Palestinian." Therefore, addressing her 'concrete national situation' is important to the expression of her identity. Yet, through the poem's thematic thread and the images it depicts,

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[51] Permission to reproduce the poem in the thesis has been given by the author

Lina conveys a sense of confinement by a clichéd national rhetoric, one with a predetermined symbolic significance, which risks sounding banal and repetitive. In this way, the subjective "I" in Lina's poem marks the tense relationship between the national and the individual. This subject "I" is defined by her nationality "Palestinian," signifying the prominence and significance of national identity in anticolonial contexts. Lina's inevitable connection to nationalist slogans and symbols—"the olive tree" or "the dove of peace" —echoes her entrapment in a rhetoric of nationalism, which she has to resist alongside her resistance to the colonial reality.

For Lina, these qualities of Palestinian identity typically celebrated in poetry often fail to represent the reality of her own oppression. The fixed images of rootedness, peace, and steadfastness, most of which are romanticised and glorified in national poetry, fail to speak to Lina's daily reality as a Palestinian woman. Such images fail to speak to the diverse and complex colonial situations that have prompted the need for the "steadfastness of refugees", the urge to resist and to throw "that rock". Lina extends the glorified image of "stone throwing"— an image that was prevalent in the aftermath of the first and second intifada—not through fixing it as a symbol of Palestinian resistance, but as the effect of a specific cause, " it was because I was angry/ about that young blue-eyed soldier/ who told me in his American accent: 'No entry.'" Therefore, in resistance to symbolic representations that misrepresent an abject reality, which defines her everyday experience, Lina does not idealise the refugee camp, for example, but draws attention to its miserable socio-political condition, depicting it as a "swamp."

Lina departs from the tendency of Palestinian nationalist poetry to use natural images to symbolise steadfastness, rootedness, and resistance, a typical literary strategy aimed at maintaining Palestinian identity in the face of Israeli denial of Palestinians and their right to their land. In fact, she concludes her poem with a wish that, one day, she will be able to neutralise these images politically; she aspires to a day when she, as a poet, can transcend the

political and the national and "see the sea for what it is/ and marvel the sunset." However, despite this wish to write poetry for poetry's sake, Lina is aware that this rhetoric will not end until national liberation is achieved with the end of colonisation. Until then, her poetry will still be occupied by "dispossessed, imprisoned, oppressed muses." Therefore, despite her critical reading of national poetry, Lina's own poetic voice is still predominantly occupied by the larger national story and her lyrics narrate colonial encounters at checkpoints, the lives of displaced refugees in camps, and other experiences of oppression. In her poem, then, we see, in the movement between the personal and the national, a dramatisation of Jameson's notion of the national allegory.

Although the poem might read as overwritten by nationalist symbols and slogans, there is evident protest against the subsuming of Lina's individual identity by such symbols. Lina's assertion "I don't want to be a symbol" echoes Palestinian female writer Sahar Khalifeh's (1985, 176) statement "I am not a symbol." It is also a protest against the symbolic representations of women that continue to be reflected in Palestinian literature in the course of the anticolonial struggle. As we saw in Chapter Three, Palestinian literary representations of women have been mostly confined to portraying them "as mothers, wives and passive sustainers of culture in a national struggle underscored by active male sacrifice" (Channaa 2010). However, in Lina's poem we see how national allegories can function as spaces of negotiation between the national story and the individual story of a woman writer. This does not mean that there is no relationship between the two different struggles and that we can simply do away with nationalism. On the contrary, the national struggle is essential in the shaping of Lina's identity as a woman, and of her poetic, lyrical voice. However, through Lina's self-conscious and critical adoption of a rhetoric of nationalism imposed upon her as part of her collective resistance to the occupation, her struggle as a woman caught by the same rhetoric also unfolds.

In the following poem, we see a more troubled relationship to the nationalist allegory in Lina's writing.

Mocking the Allegory

I know that my grandma will never approve
my gluten free mana'eesh
my zipped packed thyme
brought from Palestine
my extra-virgin olive oil
shipped from Palestine
my oven, electric with a timer
my dough, kneaded with a hand-mixer

But she also didn't like it
when I said stuff like
"Your pies are better because
they were baked in the womb
of the earth"

She hated it when I said
"Your thyme grew on rain water,
wild and free
took from the root of the land
its aroma and originality"

She shut me up when I said
"The olive oil came from
the purest of lands watered
by the tears of angels and prophets
the earliest witness of our existence
a symbol of peace long robbed from-"

She took a bite and said

"It's food, not a poem,

don't preach history

and next time don't burn the dough"[52]

In this poem entitled "Gluten-Free Mana'eesh" (March 2016), Lina creates a dialogue between the poetic persona and her grandmother, playing on some of the iconographic imagery that engenders Palestine as a geographical space and her relation to that space as a young woman. The persona, who apparently does not live in Palestine and represents the contemporary exiled individual, creates a rather romanticised image of Palestine using pastoral imagery such as that of "the olive oil", and "the thyme." She also uses the figure of the matriarch, the grandmother, which is often produced as a symbol of the rootedness to the land, the pastoral past, and the authenticity of cultural identity. By drawing her grandmother as a figure of the fallaha, or peasant, one central in Palestinian expressive culture and historiography, Lina draws a figure that has expressed a unified nation and history, representing the "idiom of Palestinian nationalism" (Swedenburg 1990, 18). The figure of the fallaha is usually used to indicate a sentiment of belonging to the Palestinian people and nation. As with many other nationalist discourses, the peasantry represents a certain "closeness to the soil" which can be used to "naturalise" a people's historical links to territory, to establish the "historicity of a territory" and the "territorialisation of a history" (Swedenburg 1990, 22). In the context of Palestine, this national pathos does not merely function as a naïve topos.[53] The symbolic weight of the

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[52] Permission to reproduce the poem in the thesis has been given by the author

[53] However, this invention of the homeland through the recollection of images and the repetition of symbols such as olive and fig trees leads to the potential frozen representation of largely changed, urbanised and colonised present landscape or geography. This symbolic representation also alludes to the lyrical pathos characterising some of the early Palestinian exilic narratives of nostalgia, melancholy and loss. This kind of writing in which "the imagery of the rural peasant, the land, and the lost house, recurs obsessively-invokes an idealised rural Palestine nostalgically remembered as a lost paradise" (Cleary 2002: 203). This conventional and holy repertoire of images of figs, olive trees, "invokes a Palestinian past that does not only proceeds Zionist colonisation but also the wider disruptions of twentieth century modernisation and development"; thus engaging in "a kind of textual rescue of

peasantry and peasant imagery is linked to the ongoing threat to the Palestinian land and nation. Swedenburg (1990, 21) argues that the evocation of such a discourse has assigned mythical qualities to the figure of the peasant:

> In response to the Israeli state's radical, material denial of their existence, Palestinian poets … confected an array of symbols – the *fallah,* the *kufiya* (Palestinian headcovering), the olive tree, the embroidered dress, the orange tree, the *za'atar* (wild thyme) – connected with a rural way of life. These figures were readily understood by readers and listeners as allegories for Palestine, the land and the people's intention of remaining permanently on the land.

Lina, thus, creates a poem within the larger poem, by presenting a highly symbolic rhetoric repeated by the poetic persona, who insists on seeing the figure of the grandmother in a romanticised light. This, in effect, produces a plethora of gendered metaphors including reference to pies baked in "the womb of the earth," and to a land described as "wild and free." But rather than affirming this gendered rhetoric, which views the land as a woman, the grandmother's voice mocks such allegorical romanticised representation, providing a humorous, even satirical twist to the end of the poem.

In this way, we can see that Lina's poem does not present an uncritical reproduction of these conventional pastoral and mythological images. The poem as a whole unfolds a tension between the mythologised and the contemporary. Lina sets up these images as a romanticised representation of Palestine by projecting the voice of a young Palestinian woman in exile, attempting to preserve her cultural heritage. This poetic persona is the voice that reiterates the rhetorical representation of Palestine, attesting to the important sentimental need to connect to

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the lost homeland and asserted their continued allegiance to it" (Cleary 2002: 203), a theme that I discuss in detail in the following chapter.

the land felt by many Palestinian exiles in order to forge ways of being in relation to that land. Yet, the images employed move between the pastoral and mythologised to the domestic and contemporary: from "olive oil [that] came from/ the purest of lands watered/ by the tears of angels and prophets" to the more contemporary "extra-virgin olive oil/shipped from Palestine." Therefore, the poem itself floats between a mythical romanticised representation of a pre-historic purity, to the most mundane contemporary and domestic. Lina achieves this not only through the play on imagery but through the lyrical simplicity and complexity of the poem's diction, as well as through the multiple voices in conversation in the poem.

Overall, Lina's poems do not deny the centrality of the national struggle nor do they disregard it completely in order to construct an oppositional gender identity. Instead, reading her poems in terms of Jameson's concept of national allegory allows readers to link her private story as a woman with the larger story of Palestine. By reclaiming a voice which sets the boundaries to her own identity and transcends the realm of the primarily symbolic, Lina begins to rework the relationship between national collective desire and gendered identity in ways that might question and destabilise, rather than simply affirm, national patriarchal power and its dominant narrative.

De/Romanticising the Heroic

Mariam, another Palestinian blogger, shares the same concerns over the romanticising effects of national allegories and narrations. In the following section, I now turn to focus on Mariam's interest in heroic allegorical archetypes and their gendered implications, through tracing the reproduction of these archetypes in her narratives, her questioning of these heroic images, and then her production of alternative images through her poetic blog. In this way, the blog which is a personal account of the suffering of Mariam's people, is itself a national allegory, but an allegory used to challenge such images. Before considering Mariam's work in some detail,

however, it is important to outline the crucial role played by the hero and the heroine in traditional Palestinian nationalist narratives.

National Narrations and the Figure of the Hero/ine

In the nationalist narratives emerging from anticolonial struggles, notions of sacrifice and heroism typically dominate. The major aim of these narratives is to promote a sense of commitment to a larger collective, political cause and to invite wide-scale participation in the struggle. Singh (2012, 535) argues that "part and parcel of this notion of sacrifice is the creation and mythification of heroes in [a] society's popular discourse." In Palestinian narratives since 1948, narrative constructions of heroes and heroines have been recurrently loaded with notions of honour, courage, perseverance, strength and selflessness. The male and female heroic figures of "the martyr", "the mother of the martyr," and "the prisoner" have, in turn, led to the invocation and reiteration of nationalist symbolic imagery such as "the motherland". This has, as a result, tended to produce static gendered imagery, which has entrapped women within the symbolic realm in conventional national representations.

As Bhabha discusses in relation to imaginative renderings of the nation (1990, 1), the "impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical" construction of Palestine through nationalist narratives has produced discursively diverse images and figures of heroism throughout its anticolonial struggle since 1948. For example, Khalili (2007) argues that the construction of the hero in Palestinian narrative has progressively shifted as a result of the fluctuating political and historical context since 1948, especially as the means of resistance have changed over time. Tragic representations, explains Khalili (2007), have replaced heroic representations, particularly in the crafting of mnemonic narratives where "in one era [they] celebrated their pasts and presents as predominantly heroic, and in another era, they have lamented the tragedy of their histories and memories" (755). Khalili explains that one of the

main factors influencing this shift has been "a transformation in dominant transnational discourses from a revolutionary Third-Worldism to the discourse of suffering prevalent in human rights or humanitarian circles" (755). Before the 1980s, the images of the Palestinian "Fida'iyyin" guerrillas, for example, with their Kalashnikovs in hand and the Kuffiyya around their necks, were some of the most celebrated icons of heroism in Palestinian nationalism and its armed struggle. These figures and the battles in which they were engaged were celebrated in posters, postcards, periodicals, political pamphlets, literary texts, ceremonies, artwork and popular narratives. However, by the 1980s, Khalili (2007, 732) points out that

> the figure of the guerrilla has receded to the background of Palestinian refugees' commemorative narrative, and tragic renderings of the past have replaced heroic ones. The iconic figure of the martyr – who may or may not have chosen martyrdom has come to the center stage of Palestinian commemoration.

Whereas figures of armed struggle, such as male and female guerrilla fighters, were the defining icons of heroism before the 1980s, the emergence of other peaceful forms of resistance, since the first intifada, produced more diverse figures and images that were later glorified. Images of the "shabab" (youth) protesting; children throwing stones; prisoners; "al-shaheed" (the martyr) as their bodies, covered with flags, were carried in funerals, were celebrated instead. The elevation of the image of "um-al-shaheed" (the mother of the martyr), depicted ululating at the funeral, referred to as "Urs" (Wedding), is another example.

The construction of heroic figures and imagery in nationalist narratives entails a degree of symbolic idealisation, as Bhabha (1990) points out above. The idealisation of figures, including the martyr, the mother of the martyr, and the prisoner, is shaped by a larger gendered nationalist narrative with its traditional, idealised perspectives on femininity and masculinity. These "heroic" roles are thus given a certain symbolic significance that reflects the gendered

"metaphorical imagination of the nation". The figure of the mother of the martyr, for example, functions as one form of traditionally determined femininity and the idealisation of womanhood.

For Palestinian female bloggers, including Mariam, participation in the nationalist struggle offers access to nationalist narratives through which they can negotiate their gendered roles. Mariam's blogs challenge and, at times, reproduce the gendered heroic representations of both men and women. The blogs both re-enact a collective nationalist suffering from which Mariam cannot isolate herself, while, simultaneously, also questioning the collective nationalist representations produced in bloggers' various witness narratives. Mariam's blog is an example of an online space disclosing such tensions between the representation of the nationalist and the feminist, the collective and the personal, the heroic and the mundane; thus, as I show, her blog texts expand rather than limit the concept of national allegory.

Mariam's Blog

Mariam Barghouti is a Palestinian activist residing in the West Bank. Her blog is a record of her on-the-ground political activism. On her participation at the Nabi Saleh protests, for example, she writes that "since December 2009 Palestinians and activists gather on Fridays in the Palestinian village of Nabi Saleh for the weekly demonstration against the colonisation of Palestinian lands and the increase of the illegal Jewish-only Israeli colonies" (Mariam 2011). Most of Mariam's blog entries are records of the non-violent protests, which, occasionally, turn to violent confrontations with the Israeli soldiers. Often, Mariam and the other protestors are "met with violence from Israeli forces by teargas canisters being shot directly at demonstrators, skunk trucks spraying fowl water at high velocity, pepper spray, violent arrests, attacks at civilian homes, sometimes physical beatings and more" (Mariam 2011). Mariam's activism is thus transposed to the online space as a witness narrative, reflecting her subjugation as a

colonised woman and her subjectivity as both an active participant in non-violent resistance and a narrator of this first-hand experience.

Re-Enacting the Collective Suffering: Reproducing Heroic Nationalist Allegories

Narratives on Mariam's blog often bear witness to first-hand experiences of violence resulting from her active participation in protests. Writing from a position of collective struggle, she reproduces heroic nationalist archetypes registering her commitment to the larger collective national cause, and this, in turn, can function as an invitation to mobilise political support. For example, Mariam's first blog entry is a commemoration for a friend, an activist who was killed by Israeli soldiers in December 2011, a year after his death. In her blog commemorating Mustafa, Mariam (December 2012) writes:

> Nabi Saleh will be fearlessly, courageously, and defiantly resisting an illegal occupation. But you already know that. You yourself died in the name of Palestine, in the name of Nabi Saleh, Akka, Yaffa, Jerusalem, in the name of a free Palestine, in the name of justice, in the name of dignity.

Mustafa's lifeless body is loaded with meanings related to the reclaiming of colonised land. Mariam further emphasises this connection as she writes, "you left the embrace of your mother, only to be embraced by the soil of our beautiful Palestine." The connection between the land and martyrdom—usually thought of as a terrain of the masculine, despite the number of female martyrs involved in the struggle—resonates with a traditional gendered image of unity between the land and the "male" martyr, which was common, especially in the first and the second Intifada. In this image, the land, Palestine, presumably a woman, was wedded to the martyr.[54]

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[54] Political leaflets distributed during the first intifada in Gaza and the West Bank declared: "Rejoice, oh Palestine, for your knights who arrive in the sun, ten thousand heroes and others who dress you in a wedding dress. And the bridegroom he is the martyr in Jabalyia and Nablus and Kfar Ni'ma in the legendary South" (Schulz 2003, 130). In another example of images of nationalist rhetoric, a leaflet issued by Hamas during the first intifada reads:

These images of unity between the land and the martyr evoke conventional concepts of femininity and masculinity, of the land portrayed as the virgin and as the object of desire, as discussed in Chapter Three. In this rhetoric, the land awaits the rescue and the sacrifice of the martyr. This also explains the allegory of the funeral of martyrs as the "wedding".

The promise to remember Mustafa – "We have not forgotten the trail of your pure red blood on the road" – leads to his purification in Mariam's narrative of collective mourning. His lifeless body becomes a symbol: carrying a political message to urge the continuation of the struggle and also memorialising injustice (Khalili 2007, 750). Mariam's mnemonic narrative invokes the memory of Mustafa as a symbol of heroic sacrifice. In another blogpost, entitled "From One Martyr to the Next", Mariam (March 2014) creates a site of collective suffering, producing another figure of nationalist heroism loaded with conventional gendered representations. As she recounts her participation in a martyr's funeral, Mariam describes the mother of one Palestinian martyr as an inspirational figure embodying the ultimate sacrifice for the national cause. She writes:

> Mutaz Washaha's mother sat in the middle dressed in black with eyes that have known nothing but tears this last week and fought a smile. It was a smile encouraging strength, embodying strength. Around 30 people enter the home of one of her relatives … to give their condolences after demonstrating in Nabi Saleh … As each one kisses her hand and forehead, she looks at them and says "you have to keep fighting, take what Mutaz began and keep going, may God give you strength, may he give you all the strength." She repeated a message to the youth visiting. Looking at each one of the shabab present as though they

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"Every day the earth absorbs the blood of the righteous. Kneel in front of the graves and bow before the martyrs of grace. This is part of the price of pride, honour, liberation and salvation. This is the dowry of those with lovely eyes, a substitute for paradise" (leaflet no. 2) (Mishal and Aharoni 1994, 206).

were her sons she asked everyone to not forget the struggle and to continue what

Mutaz was doing, resisting. She treated all of us as though we are all her children

and any resisting Palestinian is her Mutaz.

Placed at the centre of an image recounting the funeral of Mutaz Washaha, an activist friend killed in his bed by Israeli soldiers, is his mother. Washaha's mother is set to occupy the allegorical space assigned to motherhood in traditional nationalist discourse. This nationalist representation of the figure of the mother also symbolises the motherland, as "all the shebab are her sons." She retains such symbolic significance, which elevates her as an icon of resistance, as she is portrayed as someone fighting a smile "encouraging strength, embodying strength." She is also the carrier of a political message "you have to keep fighting." Portrayed as the symbol of optimum strength, the mother of the martyr, thus, affirms "the ultimately patriarchal boundaries of her existence, as such, operates as a display of strength but not necessarily of power" (Ball 2012, 68).

Mariam thus writes the mother as the symbolic figure who births the nation and nurtures and educates the children. This concept emphasises and romanticises women's role in nurturing future nationalists. Here, then, the role of the mother becomes the most important form of femininity from which two images evolve: the image of the motherland and the image of the martyr's mother. Tahboub (2009, 184) argues that such characterisation of women has no grey colours and no space for ambivalence or complexity, as "it either elevates women to the status of motherland, sainthood, and martyrdom or casts them out as immoral traitors to the cause, the Palestinian people and the country". Mariam's portrayal of the image of the motherland also invites the vision of the nation as "the fraternity of brothers" in her reference to the "shebab." She writes, "although some of the youth had been injured by Israeli forces at the demonstration and required some medical attention all of them stepped down and went to pay respects, saying 'Mutaz was our brother too.'" The concept of the "shebab", usually a non-gendered concept

referring to both male and female youth, is clearly used here to refer only to the men as "they were her sons." The scene Mariam creates in the blog referred to above is that of collective suffering, and though the image was of a mother who lost her son, Mariam's interest is not the mother's individual experience but, rather, the motherland as occupied, and her children dying. The blog speaks of the need to resist and the need for a national voice to repeat this nationalist message.

But do examples such as Mariam's blog indicate that these women bloggers simply conform to and adopt the conventional roles dictated by the national struggle and its patriarchal nature? Does this mean that their representation of the struggle in which they participate has to replicate these allegorical heroic representations of women? Or can the online blogs still offer a space for the negotiation of such tensions, extending the possibilities of women's online narratives to complicate such representation?

As I have aimed to demonstrate thus far, the reproduction of the nationalist images by Palestinian women bloggers does not confine their narratives to such gendered representations. Women bloggers problematise such narratives, either through articulating their vivid protest against the romanticising of the national struggle and resistance, or through the space offered by the creative articulation of personal accounts.

Reading through Mariam's personal accounts, we can trace a critique of such allegorical representations and an awareness of their gendered implications. It is true that the online space has provided a platform where Mariam is the active narrator of her stories, national as well as personal. However, this woman-authored version of Palestinian narrative and history operates within structures of gendered power, agency, knowledge and representation, which also shape the discourse. For example, in one of her blogs, Mariam consciously writes against individuals involved in international solidarity campaigns with Palestinians who, in their objective of

documenting Palestinian resistance against colonialism, "deviate into the path of objectifying and romanticizing resistance." Mariam writes:

> Palestinian resistance is not happening so that people can undertake art projects and the Palestinian resistors, are not models for the next art gallery. If you are in a non-compromising solidarity, your view of Palestinians should not be akin to a romantic, revolutionary novel. Romanticizing the resistance is a form of objectifying Palestinians ... The Palestinian struggle towards liberation is not a poem; it's an unforgiving reality of demanding justice and human rights… The world and we must fathom the fact that our deaths are not stories for their latest novel, they do not exist to be romanticized and fetishized. There is no poetry in death, in murder, in hijacked souls. To appropriate our death is to further inferiorize us, to exalt a perpetrator, and to paint a gallery with our blood.

Mariam reads such aestheticising of notions of sacrifice and resistance, which permeate traditional nationalist narratives as well as recent narratives of solidarity with Palestinians, as objectifying and reductive. While providing a critique of narratives that romanticise experiences of occupation, including death, imprisonment and some forms of resistance such as protests, she is, in effect, critiquing her own narratives. She is admitting that such discourses risk diluting the unique suffering of diverse individuals into a single homogenous story of the nation. This national story perpetuates a static image of heroic motherhood.

For example, in another blogpost entitled "Aggrandised portraits and destruction" (October 2014), Mariam uses the first-person plural to assert her role in creating and crafting the narrative of the nation and her contribution as a woman to the evolving construction of the national collective narrative. She does not absolve herself from the responsibility of challenging such

narratives; however, in retreating to the first-person "I" she makes it clear that there needs to be a different way to represent the national struggle. She writes:

> We chant about vengeance, whilst providing hollow promises of never forgetting and continuing the struggle. We promise and promise de novo. We forget, and repeat. One martyr after the next, as we ask their loved ones to ululate before they return to an empty bedroom and a bed in which the outline of the body that once was is no longer visible … A façade, disillusionment of the soul, misallocation of names and syllables we forget, only to be replaced by others. I have been to so many funerals that I cannot recall the names of half of the martyrs. I can, however, explain in perfect detail the anguish in their mother's eyes, or how pale their bodies looked as they lay still and breathless. I can explain to you in perfect detail how every syllable was pronounced as their friends told me stories of their times together, but their name I cannot recall anymore.

These two examples from Mariam's blogs are significant in the way they engage with narratives produced in this space, even those she produces as a Palestinian blogger. These self-reflexive critiques of nationalist narratives help shape a rather subversive and critical creative text where these questions of gendered nationalism are explored, and where alternative images are presented.

Stainless Steel

In a creative blog written in the form of a poem entitled "Stainless Steel" (April 2014), Mariam invokes the question of heroism again, yet in a more subversive way. The picture from the blog is of "bars" with a sign that reads, "Prison is a mental state, free your mind to free Palestine." The poem tells an experience of imprisonment. The blogpost itself does not clarify whether the

experience is actual or not, but the poem itself is set "behind metal bars." Later in her blog, Mariam records her experience of being detained in another post. In "Stainless Steel", Mariam writes:

They had cartoons on the walls and sang the blues,

They screamed life,

we echoed heroes.

They screamed life,

we echoed invincible.

They screamed life!

Aesthetically beautifying the macabre hidden behind metal bars and an illusion of sunlight.

Weakness,

becomes the taboo cultivated and pasted behind poetry on temporary posters.

Permanence,

is the grim reaper chuckling behind an axe.

Sharmouta,

becomes the name the strong call out.

Strength,

created by patriarchy and endorsed by the evergreens.

Pause.

The banging becomes the trigger to reality,

cockroaches,

the subtle reminder of outside interaction.

Inside they laugh,

grimace and grin,

their eyes have become home to the Sahara desert,

and now all they do is smile.

Smile and cry.

Needle point neat,

coating an uncontrollable situation, with absolute control.

Touch becomes a privilege.

Stainless steel, is the friend that caresses your dry skin,

and EVERYONE becomes a professional singer.

Imagination becomes your best friend and worst enemy.

Complexity,

is when your favorite flower is Jasmine but you ask for cacti.

The screams.

the screams pierce your ear,

and like a child you hide behind mama begging it to stop.

You beg it to stop,

until your notice it's your vocal folds vibrating.

Pause.

This isn't real.

Mama,

this isn't real.[55]

The poem presents a series of ambiguous voices, which play on conventional images of honour and strength connected to the heroic image of the prisoner retained in the nationalist narrative. The ambiguity of the voices is created at the beginning, through the alternating of the pronouns "they" and "we". Who are "they"? And who are "we"?

One way to read this poem is as a conversation between the soldiers, "they," and the "we," as the voice of the prisoners. Such a reading would conform to a notion of nationalist heroism where the experience of prison is represented as another form of "heroic sacrifice." The ambiguity of the voices, however, allows for a different reading of these lines, which destabilises the notion of the prisoner as hero. The alternating voices of "they" and "we" could refer to the tension between a collective nationalist voice: "we", and the voices of the individual prisoners behind the bars: "they." As the personal stories of those prisoners scream for "life", the adamant, insistent voice of the collective, or the national, "echoed heroes", "echoed invincible," the verb referring to the habitually repeated use of heroic discourse to describe the experience of prison in nationalist narratives.

These voices offer an insight into the tension created by a nationalist narrative that does not see beyond the romanticisation of experiences of occupation, including imprisonment. While such glorification of the prisoner's experience is essential and essentialised in the nationalist

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[55] Permission to reproduce the poem in the thesis has been given by the author.

narrative, Mariam's use of the third-person pronoun "they" illustrates how distanced "we" are from those placed behind bars; it is as though the walls surrounding them also bar us from acknowledging their humanity, while we attempt to "aesthetically beautify the macabre hidden behind metal bars." The poem assures us that acknowledging "weakness becomes the taboo cultivated and pasted behind poetry on temporary posters;" Mariam's reference here is to national poetry that celebrates the "strength" of those heroes and that shames any exposure of "weakness."

And whereas the pronouns used are also gender-ambiguous, the word "Sharmouta" (whore) reveals one of those voices to be that of a female prisoner. The word "Sharmouta" is typically used as a derogatory term to denigrate "Arabic culture through the use of sexualized language," which "was a normal practice of torture used by prison authorities against Palestinian political detainees … Many of the women were called sharmouta , qahba and manyouka; the three terms are synonyms for 'whore'" (Abdo 2014, 160). This word recalls the discussion of "honour" and "women's sexuality" within a colonial patriarchal context in Chapter Three. It is interesting that while the term is called out by "the strong", strength is generally defined as the patriarchy, whether that is a reference to the patriarchal military matrix of the occupation or the patriarchal society of which female prisoners are a part. It is true that nationalist narratives do view female prisoners as heroes, but suspicion about their subjection to sexual harassment while imprisoned can lead to social stigmatisation in a culture where "women are highly respected as the protectors of their own and their family honour" (Abdo 2014, 160). What Mariam does in her blog poem is redefine notions of honour and strength, traditionally attributed to heroic nationalist representations of resistance and their ideal vision of womanhood. In her poem, the elevated heroic figures of the prisoners are embodied subjects, as "they laugh", "grimace and grin", "smile and cry", long for a touch, and scream with fear. This portrayal does not idealise the prisoners, but speaks of the women's feelings of fear, insecurity and uncertainty in a space

where women had been expected to display strength and fearlessness in order to be honoured as nationalist heroines.

This small sample of posts from Mariam's blog is only an illustration of the tension that unfolds in the writing of many Palestinian women bloggers, women whose lives have been defined by a national anticolonial struggle. These bloggers, while reproducing heroic nationalist imagery and mythology, also scream out for the importance of another, more mundane, embodied and authentic way of representing the struggle for their readers.

Chapter 5. Narrating Palestine Online: Place, Memory and Virtual Homeward Journeys

Every Palestinian's personal discovery of their identity tends to come about in unique ways and significantly different ages. Our refugee experiences, both physical and inward … cut across a gamut of the human experience, with each one sharing a piece of a puzzle but no two alike. Yes, it is true, we are born Palestinian; with every push our mothers asserted with pride that it is what and who we are and would know to be. However, there is a moment for each of us where we begin to understand what that will mean for our lives.

(Nour Joudah February 2011)

The narratives of Palestinian women bloggers shared in the online environment are largely preoccupied with narrating Palestine as a "place". Due to the fragmentation of the Palestinian people internally and across the globe, and the ongoing colonisation of Palestinian land, most Palestinian narratives engage in what James Clifford (1986, 115) calls the "textual rescue" of the land. The act of territorial reclamation through narrating place in the online space depends on the larger narration of Palestinian collective memory through specific spatial and temporal signifiers. These narratives assert a demand for recognition of the literal place through its virtual renderings. The bloggers in this study often take part in the national effort to reconstruct home by re-telling stories they have heard about Palestine from the older generations. But as they narrate these versions of place, which they have not experienced themselves but feel they know through story, they incorporate their own contemporary realities of both forced immobility and of exile. As a result, they conjure stories that complicate a tendency towards nostalgic narratives of a pre-colonial 'home'—and its implications of a gendered 'purity' or originality—by juxtaposing such narratives with both their experiences of exile and their real encounters with 'home.'

In this chapter, I will briefly discuss the Nakba as one of the most significant sites of Palestinian collective memory, which has long shaped the Palestinian people's notions of time, place and national identity. I will go on to analyse narratives written by bloggers from three different

localities: one by a Palestinian–American writer who returns to Palestine; another by a Palestinian from Gaza who narrates her first encounters with the West Bank and Israel or "48 Palestine;" and a third written by a Palestinian refugee in Deheisha Refugee camp in the West Bank. The three blogs I examine in the chapter were originally written in English, although my selection of them was motivated, rather, by the fact that they are all concerned with the construction of place online. What these narratives also share, despite being written by Palestinians from various localities and backgrounds, are reflections on the experience of forced exile and varying degrees of immobility. The bloggers are unable to return to Palestine because of the restrictions imposed on the movement of Palestinians residing in Gaza and the West Bank to other parts of the Palestinian territories and Israel, or because of the arbitrary denial of access to Palestinians who are citizens of other states. Therefore, as these writers narrate their relation to 'place' or 'historical Palestine' or 'the pre-Nakba Palestine,' they simultaneously create, by necessity, stories of internal and external displacement.

The blog of Nour Joudah, a Palestinian–American, can simply be read as the nationalist narrative of an exiled Palestinian daughter's return to the land from which her parents were displaced in 1948. However, Nour's narratives of her various encounters with the Palestinian landscape that no longer exists in its pre-Nakba form raise questions about the implications of envisioning home through nostalgic stories of a pre-colonial landscape.[1] On Nour's blog, there are the narratives written from Tennessee and from Palestine; Palestine as narrated by her parents, and Palestine as she experiences it. Nour's movement across the Palestinian landscape enables her to inhabit an ambivalent in-between space and time, between here and there, now and then. In her "About" page, Nour introduces herself as follows: "I was born to Palestinian

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[1] In her book *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian literature*, Barbara Parmenter (1994, 43) argues that "Nostalgia became the most characteristic element of Palestinian literature in the decades following al-Nakba."

refugee parents, and came to the United States at the age of 5. I grew up in the beautiful hills of Tennessee, dreaming of the coast of Palestine."

In a blog that she started in Gaza in 2009, Rana Baker's relation to the place and her national identity are driven by her grandmother's recollections of a pre-Nakba Palestine. Her grandmother's memories provide an alternative, gendered vision of womanhood characterised mostly by a "smooth transition" across the landscape, which Rana cannot fathom due to her contemporary experience of forced immobility. But as she attempts to recreate narratives of place when she does finally encounter Palestine, her internal struggle with her simultaneous feelings of belonging and foreignness are revealed.

Reham El Helsi's blog is a record of a pre-Nakba Palestine as remembered in the collective memory of Palestinians, which is passed across generations through storytelling or oral history. Her blog is significant because it juxtaposes those memories with Reham's contemporary state of exile; it engenders a sense of place through memories of women in both the private and the public spheres, as well as the past and the present, and in the hybrid vision of Palestine as the home she imagines.

Each of the selected blogs, no matter where they were written, functions as an exilic narrative. This is not due particularly to the blogger's locality but because they introduce narratives which deal with stories of internal and external displacement. These texts envision places that are no longer accessible due to their writers' forced immobility. Glenn Bowman (1994, 139) points out:

> The fact [Palestinians] technically still live on the land that was Palestine in no
> way refutes their assertions that they are exiled from their homeland. For
> homeland is itself a term already constituted within nationalist discourse; it is
> the place where the nationalist imagines his or her identity becoming fully

realised. A domain where Palestinian identity is denied cannot be considered the Palestinian homeland, even if it were the very same ground on which they imagine the future nation will be built.

Given the present-day reality of the internal and the global geographical dispersal of Palestinians, and their limited access to territories that constituted their notion of a homeland before 1948, Aouragh (2012, 86) argues that "the internet is able to transcend space by linking people from geographically separate territories. Online spaces are *vehicles* that assert the dream of a territorial Palestinian space and empower people to visualise their own territorial place" (Emphasis in original). Therefore, the question I address in this chapter is how Palestinian women's narratives in such online environments may imagine Palestine in a way that both reflects and complicates their contemporary realities.

Nakba: A Site of Palestinian Collective Memory

Collective memory is generally referred to as the means by which groups and communities remember (Connerton 1989).[2] Writing about the function of Palestinian collective memory, Sa'di and Abu-Lughod (2007, 19) stress the important role collective memory plays in "counter-hegemonic discourse, cultural resistance, decolonization, liberation, and nation building processes." They also argue that because "Palestinian memory is, by dint of its preservation and social production under the conditions of its silencing by the thundering story

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[2] The literature on collective memory is vast and beyond the scope of this research. In the last few decades, the term collective memory has drawn significant attention by diverse disciplines including history, sociology, media and cultural studies. Most of the work on collective memory takes sociologist Maurice Halbwachs's work as a point of departure by expanding on, offering critique, or extending the categories and definitions of group memory. Halbwachs suggested that memory is always group memory, both because the individual is always a part of some collectivity, and assuming that group identity "is solidified and becomes aware of itself through continuous reflection on and reconstruction of a distinctive shared memory" (Eyerman 2001, 6). Collective memory is transmitted in an ongoing process of public commemoration and through discourses constructed by a particular group, creating social solidarity in the present. See, for example, Kansteiner (2002). Besides, the role of different media in articulating and disseminating collective memories occupies a distinctive place in contemporary media studies. See, for example, Neiger, Meyers and Zandberg (2011).

of Zionism, dissident memory, counter-memory, it contributes to a counter history" (Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007, 6). In this sense, memory in contemporary Palestinian history, with its colonial past and present, functions not to evoke a sentimental nostalgia for the past, but to engage directly with history and its present implications.[3]

I specifically use the term Palestinian collective memory in this chapter in the same manner as Bardenstein (1999, 148), who perceives collective memory as "a response to and a symptom of a rupture, a lack, an absence." Referring to Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de memoire* (sites of memory) which, according to Nora, signify the "illumination of discontinuity (1989, 16) and take as a point of reference and fixation some turning points where there is "a consciousness of a break with the past," Bardenstein (1999, 148) argues that "this discontinuity or absence of an immediate and experienced 'people-land' bond is at the core of the construction of both the Palestinian and Israeli collective memory … in different and asymmetrical ways." Thus, it is through the disruption in the bond between the land and the people resulting from the mass displacement of 1948 that the land and its landscape are often taken up as sites of Palestinian collective memory.

Despite the various significant historical events present in the collective memory of Palestinians preceding and following 1948, including the Balfour declaration, the anticolonial struggle against the British mandate, and United Nations Partition plan: Resolution 181 (1947), among many others, the Nakba remains its most traumatic site as it represents a point in Palestinian history when Palestinians' notions of both place and time were disrupted. That year resulted in the destruction of over 450 Palestinian villages and towns; most of these villages

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[3] In *The Colonial Present,* Gregory (2004, 9) points out that postcolonialism is "in part an act of remembrance". Memory invokes both "amnesia and nostalgia", a colonial amnesia in which the coloniser forgets the injustice inflicted on the subjugated people and a nostalgia on the part of the colonised for the "traditional" cultures that have been destroyed as a result of the colonial past and its claim to modernity.

were later renamed with Israeli or Hebraised names.[4] As this resulted in the fragmentation of the Palestinian nation and the displacement of two thirds of its population, the Nakba preserved its central location as an important site of collective Palestinian memory. For Palestinians, separated by geography, fragmented internally and globally, or residing within the boundaries of the Israeli state, the memory of the Nakba continues to connect these Palestinians, despite their different geographical and political contexts today. But, as many of the younger generation of displaced Palestinians do not have an embodied experience of this Palestine, they often employ the online space to produce narratives which articulate their national identity through forging alternative modes of national belonging to that place.

This also reflects the ways in which the temporal relates to the spatial in the work of writers engaged in negotiating Palestinian memory. Pierre Nora (1989) points out the deliberate nature of the construction of memory in his reference to "acts of memory." "Material sites," according to Nora, become *lieux de memoire* "only if the imagination invests them with a symbolic aura" (Nora 1989, 19). Similarly, as explained above, orientation to place is of special significance in Palestinian memory; Sa'di and Abu-Lughod (2007, 25) point out that, for Palestinians, "the places of the pre-Nakba past and the land of Palestine itself have an extraordinary charge. They are not simply sites of memory but symbols of all that has been lost and sites of longing to which return is barred."

Collective Memory and Diasporic Cultural Identity

Anthropologists who have studied the Palestinian diasporic experience, especially for those Palestinians whose exile is not temporary, argue that it is through preserving this collective

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[4] Nakba and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1948 as historical events have been discussed in the works of Palestinians including Abu-Sitta (1998); Davis (2010); Masalha (1992, 2009, 2012); Nazzal (1978). The event has also been revisited by Israeli revisionist historians including Pappe (2004, 2006) and Shlaim (1995).

memory that their collective identity is sustained in diaspora. In her discussion of Palestinian identity in diaspora, Sayigh, for example (1977, 18), states that "subordinate group identity" is the identity sustained in communities sharing a common situation in a larger society; the situation is usually that of oppression or discrimination imposed by a more powerful official regime.[5] In such a state of power imbalance, which involves feelings of insecurity, one way by which a group can improve their position is by asserting their difference and by transferring their collective identity to future generations. As a result, the significance of a shared history, memory and identity is common within diasporic communities who have witnessed some form of forced exile. For example, in his discussion of cultural identity and diaspora as represented in Caribbean cinema, Hall (1994, 223) argues that one of the very significant ways of thinking about a diasporic 'cultural identity' is through its "oneness":

> one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self' … which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This oneness underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence.

Hall (1994) stresses the importance of *not undermining* the significance of "the act of imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered, essential identity entails." "Hidden histories", according to Hall (1994, 224), "have played a critical role in the emergence

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[5] Rosemary Sayigh's anthropological studies of women's Nakba stories (1977, 2007), especially as they relate to the women who witnessed the Nakba, insist on the idea that women were unconsciously excluding themselves from the process of writing history and disqualifying their stories, due to either being illiterate or being excluded at the time from participating in the political and nationalist struggle. Women thus felt that their memories and narratives, "were unfit to give authoritative accounts of events, and generally undervalued their participation in the events" (Fleischmann 2003, 47).

of many of the most important social movements of our time—feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist." Similarly, preserving this collective memory, according to Glamour (1983, 90) has helped "to preserve the Palestinian identity even in the most unpromising conditions." But memory harnessed in this way can also risk the idealisation of the past, resistance to time and change, as well as obliteration of any concept of difference. It might even lead to the canonisation of certain stories, images and symbols of the past. This form of collective identity, highlighting the unity and the oneness of the nation and its past, is integral to the Palestinian experience of forced diaspora and everyday colonial reality, and it manifests online through ongoing acts of "restoring an imaginary fullness or plenitude to set against the broken rubric of [the] past" (Hall 1994, 225).

However, in my choice and analysis of the selected online narratives, I am more interested in Hall's second version of diasporic cultural identity, which is more unsettling: a position that "recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather … 'what we have become'" (Hall 1994, 225). This version of cultural identity enables us to acknowledge that the rupture and the temporal discontinuities created by the Nakba in the Palestinian context have constituted and also helped produce diverse diasporic identities of Palestinians internally and around the globe. According to Hall (1994, 225), "cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. And far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power." Diasporic cultural identities, argues Hall (1994), have to be thought of as a dialogic relationship between two axes that operate simultaneously: "the vector of similarity and continuity and the vector of difference and rupture. … The one gives us some grounding in, some continuity with, the past. The second reminds us that what we share is precisely the experience of a profound discontinuity" (227). Therefore,

Palestinian diasporic identity does not only derive from a shared sense of collective memory but also through a sense of discontinuity resulting from the past and Palestinians' ongoing sense of displacement. In this sense, memory not only functions to bring the nation together, but it can also shed light on the difference within the nation itself. Hence, I turn to Sa'di and Abu-Lughod's assertion that "no memory is pure, unmediated, or spontaneous" (2007, 3), and that memory's function is not merely to tread upon nostalgia for an idyllic past, but to engage in the present and to envision future possibilities.[6] I focus on how such narratives—written by a younger generation of Palestinian women bloggers to remember the Nakba and imagine home—can potentially unsettle the notion that Palestinians carry with them an original site of displacement by projecting their experience of the site, by remembering it, experiencing it, and representing it.

Websites of Memory[7]

In her discussion of the significance of the internet in online nation-building, especially for a diasporic community such as that of the Palestinians, Aouragh (2012, 126) suggests that

> the internet shapes national identities, and the aims of many websites and discussion forums can be described as nation-building. Palestinians hook up with other Palestinians to express, share, debate, listen, view or negotiate. And

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[6] In *Catastrophe and Exile*, Ihab Saloul (2012, 17) critiques ways in which nostalgia came to signify a negative sentiment that connotes "an emotional addiction to an unreliable and idealised past." This, Saloul argues, meant that nostalgia is portrayed as a mere escape from the present, as an opposite to progress, and a threat to political agency. In his discussion of how nostalgia relates to geopolitically conflicted discourses of memory and identity such as that of Palestine, Saloul argues that "nostalgia is an emotion that allows for a form of cultural transmission of memory. Within this transmission, historical and cultural purposes can vary, and thus the emotion can bear a complex and potentially productive relationship to the past." In the Palestinian context, Saloul points out that, "the object of nostalgia is as much as part of the present as it is of the past" (2012, 17). And he asks for an alternative way to tackle nostalgia, not only as a mere psychic sentiment that idealises the past but as an important element in the ongoing process of identification between the subject and his or her (lost) place as represented in Palestinian literary and cultural artefacts.

[7] The term "(Web)sites of Memory" was used by Tamar Ashuri (2012) in his discussion of the role of the internet in creating moral mnemonic agents, whose personal accounts help destabilise the nation's sense of collective memory, and its tendency towards collective amnesia.

precisely because of this, the internet has the potential to challenge national

identities concurrently. The synergy between technological developments,

diaspora participation and political identity has led to an online public sphere

where these identities are negotiated on the internet.

Thus, navigating these memories in an online environment means, for bloggers, an ongoing

process of negotiating national identity, and reconfiguring idealised images previously

constructed as they meet the present reality. Aouragh (2012, 127) illustrates how the online

space and transnational encounters facilitated by chats, email lists, news, activism, or even

personal communications could lead to transforming the 'nation.' These communications could

result in initiating "little cracks" in the image of the Palestine preserved in diasporic

communities. As these diasporic communities navigate Palestine online, they navigate the

meanings they attach to that place, as well as compare their own exilic realities to the

contemporary cultural realities in Palestine today.[8] Therefore, online narratives (storytelling,

oral history, mapping and re-mapping, remembering) are some of the ways Palestine as a 'place'

or 'home' is constructed in the online environment.[9] The stories, their transmission through the

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[8] Aouragh (2012) gives an example of an internet café user in a cafe in the camps of Lebanon and his first online encounter with a Palestinian from Gaza who showed no interest in politics back in 2004. The Palestinian refugee in Lebanon was shocked at seeing such indifference. This to some extent unsettles any idea of a homogenised resistance or desire for reclamation amongst all Palestinians.

[9] Such acts, which aim at invoking memories of and inscribing memories into the territorial place, permeate online blog narratives in general. The bloggers whose work I analyse for this chapter attempt to narrate a Palestine that is inaccessible, due to the colonial reality. But the chapter does not cover bloggers who live in Israel as Israeli citizens. Those Palestinians who remained in their homes after the establishment of the state of Israel are also often described as 'internally displaced Palestinians'. Palestinian bloggers inside Israel often write in Arabic because the language constitutes, in part, how they define themselves as Palestinians. Writing in Arabic also becomes a mode of resistance in a space where Arabic speakers are discriminated against, despite Arabic being an official language in Israel until 2018. Writing in Arabic is an act of reinscribing their Palestinian identity in the space, redefining, remapping, and renaming the colonised space to match their Palestinian collective memory and identity. Most significantly, writing in Arabic also means connecting to an audience with a shared collective identity and memory. They speak to other Palestinians who are displaced internally and around the globe, yet are denied access to that geographical territory. Many bloggers purposefully map their cities though re-imagining, revisiting, reusing the past names of streets through their online narratives. A major focus of these blogs thus becomes their obsession with space, describing, visiting, naming, touring, and exploring the present space to narrate it to those who have no access to it. Recreating and re-narrating these geographies responds to the nostalgic need to connect to these places felt by many displaced Palestinians. Rasha Hilwe, a Palestinian citizen of the state of Israel, writes, "a refugee friend once told me: do not speak to me about what I won't like about home. Walk me

online space in general, and through the accounts of Palestinian women bloggers in particular, trigger memories that illustrate the exilic imagination of the Palestinian people.

Virtual Homeward Journeys

Nour Jouda's Blog

Nour began writing her personal blog in the aftermath of the revolutions across the Middle East, in the wake of the Libyan revolution of February 2011. As more voices spoke out in response to a larger dynamic of resistance to oppressive narratives, Nour's blog stands as evidence of the significance of national narrations as identified by Bernard (2013) in this geographical space and historical period. However, in her first blog entry, entitled "A Transformation of Discovery," written in response to the Libyan revolution, a place where she spent part of her childhood as a Palestinian refugee, Nour (February 2011) protests against any fixed unitary concept of national narration. She demands a reconsideration of these kinds of limiting narratives, as she writes:

> These revolutions are not a discovery of national identity. No. They are a discovery of ownership. Ownership of our own lives, of our communities, but most importantly – ownership of our dignity and a freedom that no man can tell us is not our right. A right we do not need to be given, because we have seen that we can take it. Today, the stories and lists of moments that teach us are transformed.

These events revived as well as redefined the practice of creating and disseminating nationalist narratives in the online space. The blogosphere offered a platform, perhaps particularly for

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slowly in my dreams, and leave me to draw the roads which my father narrated to me until I return. And then, we shall have enough time to curse life" (Hilwe 2008, my translation).

young people such as Nour, for negotiating the meanings of nationhood, and attempting to alter its long and variously oppressive histories in the Middle East.

In her childhood exile in Libya, Nour tells how her "discovery of her national identity" was initiated by a sense of displacement. We see that in her recollection of the way her family left Libya and how that influenced her understanding of 'who' she was, as a Palestinian refugee. Nour (February 2011) writes:

> For me, I began learning what being Palestinian would mean, for my life, in Libya. It meant there were places that didn't want me. And it meant that when those places said 'get out', finding somewhere to go – and then get out of – was the fight of a lifetime for my parents.

Before the revolution, there was the fear and the silence, and Nour's story might not have been shared online, but it was this need to break free which activated the inscribing of her exilic memory and her quest for a national identity in the process.

"The Landscape of Return"

The Landscape of Return, a subsection of Nour's blog, is a chronicle of her return to Palestine, the Palestine of the tales of her father, and the Palestine of her own imagination. The series of posts explored here function as exilic narratives of return as they record Nour's narrative encounters with imagined spaces. Between May and August 2015, Nour writes extensively about her trips across the landscape of '48 Palestine': to Ramallah, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nablus, Nil'in, Yaffa, Layali, Lifta and her hometown of Isdoud. Through Nour's ventures into those places to which she was previously denied access, she attempts to redefine her relation to Palestine, constructed through the stories and memories of her father.

The web address of her blog,[10] as Nour explains in her "About" page, "is in remembrance of [her] family's home village of Isdoud, Palestine, from which they were expelled during the Nakba in 1948. The village, like hundreds of others, is no longer inhabited and has been virtually erased from contemporary existence." Nour's choice of language such as "virtually erased" speaks to her need to reconstruct Isdoud virtually, through narrating the space online. On her site, she composes narratives of her encounters with the Palestinian landscape, juxtaposing those encounters with her father's narratives of the space from his pre-Nakba memories. She thus infuses those places fixed in the memories of exiled Palestinians in their pre-colonial form, with detailed account of her trips to these places and her conversations with their residents, describing their current reality and the changes in the landscape that she observes.

The erasure of the village of Isdoud in 1948 and the expulsion of its residents, including Nour's grandparents, did not result in the erosion of this place from Nour's memory. Reviving this site of memory online takes place at the level of naming through referring to the pre-1948 names of cities and villages, which, even if they still exist, have ceased to be named according to the pre-Nakba Palestinian lexicon. Ashdod exists today as the Hebrew adoption of the original Arabic Isdoud. Naming and preserving names of lost and destroyed villages and cities has become a resistance strategy adopted by Palestinians for keeping alive the memory of these places through passing place names from one generation to the next (Masalha 2012), whether by naming their children after them or by taking on the village name as their family names. For example, female children have been given names commemorating cities from which their families have been displaced, including Jenin, Yaffa, and Bisan. In fact, Slyomovics (1998, 201) observes that "among Palestinian Arabs, the practice of naming a child after a lost or

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[10] Nour's website address is www.isdoud.wordpress.com

destroyed place seems to be reserved for daughters rather than sons." The same tradition is preserved online through the different names refugees choose as their online identity.

In the first of her series of blogs recording her first trip to Palestine, a blog entitled "The Landscape of Return" (May 2011), the movement between the past and the present is apparent, as Nour begins by explaining how the Nakba continues to be lived in the present and impacts the lives, identities and agency of Palestinians today, including herself. Nour (May 2011) writes:

> The irony is not lost on me that I landed in Amman on May 15,[11] nor that the 6 hour interrogation I underwent as I was crossing the border in to Palestine 2 days later was almost 63 years ago to the week that my father fled with his family and neighbors from Isdoud to Gaza.

Thus, Nour does not describe her displacement as a consequence of the Nakba as an event in a fixed historical moment, but forges a dynamic connection between past and present. She moves between a past which she did not witness and a near present which she has experienced, and it is both past and present together that shape her identity. The date which is commemorated every year by Palestinians in remembrance of the Nakba, 15 May, is the same day Nour returns to Palestine. Her arrival, coinciding with the dismissal of the Palestinians over sixty years earlier dramatises a collective wish to return to Palestine, a dream shared by many Palestinians, who are reminded of their dispossession and displacement on that anniversary. Displacement for Nour is not the act of her family's expulsion from Palestine, but it is a constant process and an evolving performative task in which identity is always in the making: her identity as a refugee. Displacement is the everyday lived experience of Palestinians. Memory, thus, is not the re-enactment of the past as much as the way those past occurrences and the narratives associated

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[11] The date Palestinians commemorate the Nakba.

with them help shape the present. Bardenstein (1999, 149) refers to this as the "present-orientedness" of memory: the construction of collective memory is inextricably linked with the construction of collective identity and imagined community in the present. In this sense, Nour's narrative of return re-focalises the everyday experience of exile, and helps in constructing her personal narrative of a unique contemporary story of the collective Palestinian loss of homeland. Omar Al-Qattan (2007, 191) points out that, "there is no single Palestinian memory of the Nakba; rather, there are many tangled memories. A collective memory or experience is in its nature complex and elusive." It is in this sense that Nour describes her present interrogation at the border as an example of the "ongoingness" of the Nakba.

However, as Nour narrates her enactment and performance of the return, and her actual encounter with the place as it exists now, she is faced with the ambivalence that results from comparing this encounter with the image of Palestine in her memory and imagination. Through her initial wandering into the physical spaces of the lost homeland and in her searching for traces of memory, she conjures up for the reader the juxtaposition of a dreamy past made of stories and maps with the harsh realities of the present. Nour (May 2011) writes that "the bus ride down south was a borderline disturbing introduction to the moving landscape – distorted with colonial presence, Israeli flags, signs in Hebrew, and fields and hills populated with trees not native to the land." This changed landscape caused by the present colonial reality challenges and thus distorts her invented 'memory' of Palestine as home. Those signs of colonialism thus disrupt her vision of her "native land" and disturb her desire to return to a sense of the "lost origin" or nativity. But this uncomfortable encounter with the "moving landscape" also compels Nour to conjure distinct memories, and pursue a search for home indefinitely. Nour's narratives thus display a strong desire to connect with these places, which she perceives as home. Through her decision to write in detail and to document her temporary return to Palestine, Nour consciously embarks on a traversal of her exilic experience as a Palestinian by moving *towards*

the narrated motherland, instead of narrating her life in diaspora. Most of these narratives thus result in revisiting her memory of Palestine and inscribing memory in a place that she has always defined as the 'homeland', thus, forging new modes of belonging. Therefore, instead of celebrating her exilic identity, Nour sets off on a journey to bridge the image–reality gap as it pertains to representations of Palestine, and she opens up a space for envisioning possibilities for women returning. In a blog entitled "The Road to Yaffa" (June 2011), Nour highlights the sense of seeing. She writes:

> Going to Yaffa was transformed. It was so many things. It would be the first time I'd see the sea in Palestine outside of Gaza. It would be the closest I'd ever been to Isdoud. It would be driving from the "territories" to the Palestine of stories and dreams. It would be this piece I almost didn't believe was real. It would be seeing what was no more. It would be seeing what still is. It would be seeing what so many cannot fathom being able to see. Whatever the trip was transformed into and for whatever reason, I started crying in Jerusalem and didn't stop until we pulled in to the bus station in Tel Aviv. It was a slow, quiet cry, and it was a long time coming.

In another blogpost, entitled "Sawri, Dakheelik, Sawri" (Take Photos, For God's Sake, Take Photos), Nour's (May 2011) symbolic reference to photos highlights a fixed image of home, a pre-dispossession Palestine in the memory of most exiled Palestinians. The few lines of the blog report a phone call between the narrator, a returnee, and Ruba, her diasporic cousin in Tripoli, illustrating "what the promise of picture can mean, when it might be the closest you'll ever get to home". Ruba is desperately requesting from Nour some photos of Ramallah, a place that exiled Palestinians like herself are not allowed to visit or return to. Aouragh (2012, 149) discusses the significance of photos of Palestine for those who have never seen their homeland.

The online circulation of photos allows these refugees to "exhibit virtual traversals to Palestinian cities and villages." In resistance to both time and the colonial expansion into and transformation of the landscape, homeland persists and is imagined within the frames of these unchanging pictures. The photos resemble the sense of paralysis experienced by the refugees, trapped by their status.[12] Those photos may also be read as the means by which Palestinians attempt to preserve control over both the spatial and temporal modalities, in an imaginative, visual and textual act of Clifford's notion of "textual rescue," resulting from the ongoing colonisation of Palestinian land, its continued confiscation by Israel and the increasing activities of settlement building. Said refers to the process as the need "to reclaim, rename and reinhabit the land" and the alienated landscape through imagination (Said 1999, 173).

Ruba's exclusion from such places is reflected in the English transliteration of the Arabic conversation. Nour, though perfectly capable of translating the conversation into English, has chosen to 'transliterate' most of Ruba's comments in Arabic, thus denying the non-Arabic-speaking reader access to what she says. The obscurity of the content of the conversation to the non-Arabic-speaking reader is also means of replicating the perpetual state of alienation that Ruba herself experiences, where "the lived present is characterised by a longing for an absent meaning" (Suleiman & Muhawi 2006, 32). This linguistic act of code-switching, the process in which speakers of more than one language move back and forth between their languages, and blend them together, locks out the non-Arabic-speaking reader, and it can be read as Nour's way of establishing and securing the boundaries of the nation.[13] The fact that Nour chooses to lock off meaning from a transnational readership, and to create meaning through switching between both languages is also evidence of how these narratives do not only function as counter

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[12] With the passage of time, those refugees, whose status was once promised to be temporary, have started to lose hope of any close return, especially after the signing of the Oslo Accords.

[13] However, as there are diasporic Palestinians who cannot read Arabic, whether in script or in transliteration as well as non-Palestinians who can, her attempt to police the boundaries highlights their immutable nature.

narratives or witness narratives. They are not just aimed at a global readership or used as activist tools to create a nationalist narrative, but they are means by which women try to understand themselves as subjects and by which they try to forge a new relationship to the land through these very intimate personal and family narratives.

Whereas the conversation between Nour and her cousin highlights, for Nour, a sense of shared memory of a lost home and displacement, the conversation also alludes to the gendered implications and the differences implicit in the experience of displacement.[14] Recounting the phone call with her cousin Ruba in Libya, Nour herself reflects on such dissonance: her own freedom to move and her cousin's reality of restricted movement. She writes:

> There was the slightest quiver in her voice when I told her where I was. I hesitated to answer her question with 'Ramallah', knowing it was almost asking for heartbreak … I know part of the quiver of her voice in her response was just that I was anywhere other than Tripoli, anywhere where you could go outside the walls of your house. The other part was an envy of a different brand.

In voicing displacement, therefore, there are "so many stories, so many journeys: each one, fantastic in its particularity and yet mediated and touched by broader relationships of social antagonism" (Ahmed 1999, 342) including class relations and the politics of gender. Therefore, displacement is not a shared human condition but "involve[s] complex and contradictory relationships to social privilege and marginality" (Ahmed 1999 342). Nour's movement as a diasporic subject involves a degree of privilege due to her class status and her American citizenship. However, Nour's narrative also highlights the less privileged diasporic figure of

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[14] Sayigh (2007, 137) argues that uprooting and exile were amongst the many factors that "have changed life conditions for women in particular, partially creating a 'new' Palestinian woman and disrupting gender boundaries". But contrary to the notion of the grand narrative of a 'nationalist discourse', Sayigh points out that "What it means to be an upper-class Palestinian woman of Christian origin in New York is very different from what it means to be Muslim Palestinian woman living in the Jalazon refugee camp. Each has experienced estrangement and exile but in different ways and under different circumstances."

Ruba, whose exilic identity is characterised by a dual sense of immobility, restricted by the boundaries of differently gendered codes, which limits her voice even within Nour's narration to a quiver, and makes her movement beyond "the walls of [her] house" less possible.

In the same blogpost, she records another phone conversation with a second cousin in Gaza, when Nour is asked to take photos of "Palestine"

"Sawriliyaha Falasteen, Nour! Sawriliyaha!"

"Habibti, inti fi Falasteen… gazdik, asawrlik il Dafa?"

"La2! Sawrili Falasteen kolha!"

> "Take photos of Palestine, Nour! Take photos of Palestine for me"
>
> "Oh my love, you are in Palestine. You mean, take photos of the West Bank"
>
> "No! Take photos of Palestine, all of it."[15]

These very short conversations with Nour's displaced family member in Gaza illustrate the significance of place in the collective memory of Palestinians, and how it holds within it an impossible demand to write an overwhelming nostalgia for home as it exists within this collective memory: an imagined pre-colonial paradise. It is an invitation to write "Palestine" as an entirety, one image and one vision, but this demand for this unitary representation of Palestine is somehow deconstructed through the cousin's sense of dislocation. While she is already in Palestine – "Oh my love, you are in Palestine" – she still needs to see it 'as a whole'.

Unlike some of her fellow Palestinians denied access to their homeland, Nour cannot hold onto the visions they preserve, despite her need to be part of the collective experience and to capture

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[15] My translation.

a similarly coherent and stable image of the nation. On her return to Palestine, she is confronted with a different present to which she has to adapt. In her blog "The Landscape of Return II" (Nour July 2011), she tells the story of her homeward journey to her original town, Isdoud. Raised as a Palestinian refugee in the United States, Nour finally decides to pay a visit to the city that her father's tales have inscribed in her memory as 'home'. Assuming the fixity and changelessness of the city's landscape since his last visit, her father draws her a map of the town. Nour gives a copy of the map as a present to the grandmother of a friend, who "was shocked to see the town put on paper like that, shocked that someone still remembered it that way." On her arrival at the site of memory, the incompatibility with the present landscape of the map her father has drawn according to his memories of the city places Nour in a state of ambivalence and despair. She admits that she got lost several times because "the road to Isdoud had changed dramatically from the last time Sameh had gone, and suffice to say, even more since Dad's last trip in '86." She is thus lost in both time and space, between what she has visualised and what she now sees. Nour describes her first encounter with the landscape:

> It's the first time I've seen its hills and trees aside from in pictures. It's the first time I've looked with my own eyes upon this image of Palestine that so many others have. The change in terrain is jarring and yet isn't in the same moment. It isn't the village my father spent years describing to me in detail and it isn't the coast I've spent summer afternoons on, but I know the scenes, the hills, the rooftops, the streets and alleyways, and the olive trees in the same sort of comfortable manner.

Nour's recognition of those spaces, which she first encountered imaginatively through the memories and images her father shared with her, is now the result of a real encounter with the land as it exists in the present. She re-establishes her own relationship with the land as she

realises that she cannot connect to it in the same manner as her father does. However, she is still part of the collective, the "so many others" who still imagine their homeland, in their effort to maintain their national identity. Nour's identification with the land requires thus the reconciliation between the stories her father has told and the changes she sees in the present, between the imaginary homeland and the reality of the present.

"Stories from Re-exile"

Nour's narratives of her journey across the Palestinian landscape continue for the next year up till April 2012, when she blogs of the time she took her parents back to Isdoud, resorting to images instead of narrative to capture the moment.[16] But that blog is the end of her "Landscape of Return" section of the blog. The narrative suddenly moves back to the United States, to March 2013, where she starts writing a new section, entitled "Stories from Re-exile." It is only then that readers understand that this rupture in the narrative is the result of Nour being denied entry to Palestine despite the valid visa on her American passport, as she writes of her multiple failed attempts at re-entering the previous year. And in the same way that the Nakba has for a long time shaped her understanding of her identity as an exilic Palestinian whose life is characterised by a sense of persistent rupture and discontinuity, she describes the sudden denial of her entry to Palestine as a "re-affirmation of exile," where "exile is not a static experience, and it is redefined throughout our lives in the diaspora and throughout our experiences, and a very tenuous relationship we have with the concept of home." But also in the deferral of her narrative is the choice of "not telling," of the silence that follows a trauma and before the experience is (perhaps) articulated into narrative. Even in a narrative form as urgent or

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[16] In fact, in many incidents, Nour does not use writing to represent her encounter with spaces, especially those which are connected to traumatic histories; here, she resorts to other media such as photographic images and videos (April 2012). In her encounter with Lifta, Nour writes, "I'm not sure any amount of description, even in my most eloquent of lucky writing moments, can come close to describing what it is like to see Lifta, to see what was built over Deir Yasseen and from the blood of its former residents" (July 2011).

immediate as the blog, there are ruptures in narrative, and moments of silence, in which Nour chooses not to write. Months later, Nour (March 2013) writes:

> In many ways, our stories will always belong to each other. We, like our stories, find strength in our shared struggles. Though our struggles are diverse and at times overwhelming in difference or degree of heartbreak, we should not shy away from adding our own voices to the stories we tell… My exile is made up now of more than my father's march from Isdoud to Gaza, or my mother's birth in Rafah. It will forever be those things first, but it is also my time at the border, my denial stamps in my passport, my mug shot, my detention, my irrational guilt for letting myself travel, my shame at letting them see me cry at the very end, and my return to a home in the US that will now always feel a little more out of place than it already did.

Nour's ongoing displacement places her back within the Palestinian collective experience of forced immobility. Her denial of access to the land serves as a memory trigger, a memory now grounded in her embodied experience of Palestine; thus, the present re-enactment of displacement is both that experienced by her parents and that defining her direct experience as an exiled subject herself.

But as she returns to her "re-exile" in the USA, Nour's narrative, which has hitherto focused entirely on her desire for return, on exploring her national identity and her memory of a place she imagined through story, now shifts between Palestine and Tennessee. So does the function of memory as Nour shifts between cultural references that suggest she is neither fully in Palestine nor fully in the US. In a blog entitled "Anti-Triggers" (Nour October 2013), written in response to her experience of being denied entry into Palestine, Nour's search for "home" after her homeward journey to Palestine becomes even more ambivalent, and her definition of

home less coherent. The ambivalence is reflected in the instability of the narrative as it moves between poetry and prose, in its relying heavily on images of movement and transition in resistance to fixity in time and place. Nour starts the blogs with these lines:

> Trauma introduces therapy in the day to day.
>
> The long walk
>
> Underwater swims
>
> Train rides and buses to them
>
> Memories turned short stories

Her traumatic experience of home, which led to another rupture, a contemporary personal experience of displacement rather than one based on a collective memory, produces more recent narratives of exile as experienced by Palestinians. Nour's narratives from "re-exile" are less confident about definitions of home, one in which the body is always in transit. In her stories of "return" to Palestine, Nour takes the reader with her to her trips across Palestine, and presents fragments of her trips to cities, orienting the reader to her location, narrating those geographies and her encounters with those spaces. Yet, in the narratives from her "re-exile" and after her experience of personal rupture with the homeland, Nour draws increasingly on images of transition, movement that lacks a determined destination. Instead, the status of transition and the constant movement become the destinations, "the train rides and buses to them". In this sense, her narrative corresponds to what Edward Said considers a main feature of Palestinians' representation of their present existence. Said writes: "since the main features of our present existence are dispossession, dispersion, and yet also a kind of power incommensurate with our stateless exile, I believe that essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression should represent us." However, Nour complicates this postcolonial topos of migrancy (often celebrating a state of cosmopolitan arrival) by depicting her arrival in the US as an experience of alienation and trauma. And despite conveying a feeling of placelessness

and emphasising the "comfort of transition", Nour's emphasis on such a transition is in the "hope of a healing arrival that momentarily expunges the trauma."

Nour's journey back to Palestine and the online narratives she produced as a result of her encounter with home is not a rediscovery of any essential national identity, or origin, but rather highlights the constant reproduction of the discontinuities and the ruptures that characterise her identity as an exile. The rupture in the overall narrative of her blog (the narratives of return she writes all end abruptly; they are not resolved), corresponds with the sense of discontinuity characterising her life. In this manner, her blog narrative does not provide a simple answer to the question "how does it feel to be home?" Instead, it somehow problematises the idea of a substantive home, or the notion that there can be one shared experience of home and homecoming, especially within the ongoing colonial context of Palestine.

Rana's Blog

Rana is a young Palestinian who was born, raised and mostly educated in Gaza. On her blog's "About" page Rana explains: "I have established this blog as a humble attempt to give some perspective on the events that take place in Palestine and especially Gaza, where I live. My blog, "Memory Drafts and Future Alleyways", was named after its main purpose, which is to tell original and personal stories from the past, present and future." Indeed, Rana's blog is an example of online life writing as an ongoing process of negotiating national identity and an ongoing process of identification. Between 2011 and 2014, Rana's blogs are preoccupied with narrating Palestine as a geographical space to which she attaches herself. Her conception of national identity is derived from a collective memory of Palestine. As a Palestinian who lives in Gaza, and is thus denied access to the "Palestine" of her grandmother's recollections, Rana's life-writing narratives help her forge her own connection to the land through incorporating her contemporary exilic experience of Palestine. Her narratives thus motivate her to reconsider the

construction of her national identity in relation to her own distinct memory. Rana's early narratives of home are based on a sense of collective memory of a shared past and a shared collective national story of dispossession; thus, they are also nostalgic narratives of return to an imagined "pre-colonial paradise." However, since Rana makes the very act of remembering a significant theme within her narrative, her narrative becomes self-reflexive about the function of memory, her relation to the homeland, and her Palestinianness. As a result, Rana's narrative moves to disrupt a collective memory of a unified Palestinian identity. When the memory of Palestine starts to clash with Rana's present experience of exile,[17] the narrative portrays her feelings of dislocation, her constant search for home, and her failure to identify. In this way, she starts creating those cracks in the wall—cracks in what it means to be a "Palestinian" today—a "fugitive in her own country."

Earlier Narratives: "Palestine, My Grandfather's Figs and Olive Groves"

In Rana's blog "Palestine, My Grandfather's Figs and Olive Groves" (December 2011), through the figure of her grandmother "Nadra", the relation between the land, womanhood, narrative, memory and identity is reconsidered (see Appendix A: Figure 2). It is not fatherly descent that forms Rana's national identity, but the stories and recollections of her grandmother. It is no surprise that although she identifies the land as belonging to her grandfather, as suggested by the title, Rana's grandmother is the agent of the stories told about those lands, thus the agent of memory. Therefore, unlike the traditional national narratives in which women are celebrated for their biological capacity to reproduce nationalists or where their agency is derived from their ability to bear the nation's sons, Rana derives her sense of national identity from her grandmother's ability to reproduce stories and memories of the land, narratives of the past.

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[17] It is worth mentioning that over 70 percent of Gaza's population are refugees who were displaced from their original homes, villages, and cities in 1948 and 1967. They are thus internally displaced.

Rana writes of the ongoing activity of storytelling in which she engages in the company of her grandmother. This online blog written by a third-generation Palestinian refugee about her grandmother's recollections of her memories of home evokes different experiences of the land. The act of narration confronts us with two different perspectives of home. First is the image of home to a generation that has directly experienced it in the past and may therefore have a fixed past image of it (i.e., Rana's grandparents), and the other image is invented and inherited by a generation that has almost no physical connection to this same land. The transfer of this experience from a generation that experienced homeland but was driven out to another younger generation that was denied accessibility to those places occurs through another act of narration. Displaced and prohibited from the land of '48 Palestine', Rana has now been cut adrift by the present political reality of fragmentation, where a "smooth transition" is not something she can envision as a possibility. Rana (December 2011) states that "it is really difficult to imagine that the young adventurous woman who could 'smoothly' go to and enjoy Jerusalem is the same one as my wrinkled grandmother." It is clear that the narrator's experience as a Palestinian woman in Gaza is radically different from that of her grandmother, whose access to Palestinian spaces as a young adult was greater than hers.

In these early narratives, Rana's accessibility to those lands and thus to her own identity as a Palestinian takes the form of invention and imagination in relation the ongoing act of storytelling. Besides, Rana's understanding of her "roots and ancestral identity" is largely achieved through weaving together the recollections of her grandmother's "sweet pre-dispossession memories." These narratives are examples of how Palestinians have used storytelling to preserve images of the homeland, and how these stories were passed on through family and family narratives. As Rana writes, "we are raised to identify ourselves with our heritage and the villages or towns from which we originally descend." In this sense, Rana too takes part in an act of the "textual rescue of the lost homeland" in order to assert her ongoing

relation to that land; in this way, her narratives can be seen as feeding into stories of nostalgia. In these texts, a pre-Nakba Palestine, with an idealised past, is celebrated as a "heritage of religious tolerance", for example.

Similarly, in her blog, "My Jerusalem Diaries" (May 2011), Rana engages in the same process of idealisation of the "Holy City" as she recounts a visit in her childhood (see Appendix A: Figure 3). She states:

> One, even if only nine, could speak of the serenity of the place, the purity of the atmosphere, and above all, one could feel the genuineness and depth of the relationship between the Palestinian and the land. A relationship that had been originally created and developed by our ancestors and those who followed.

Her only visit to Jerusalem when she was nine provides a largely conventional image of Jerusalem, the city which Said claims has been one of the few spaces overlain with symbolic associations that obscure the existential reality of Jerusalem. This place thus becomes, as Said (2000, 180) notes, "a city, an idea, an entire history, and of course a specifiable geographical locale … overdetermined when it comes to memory, as well as all sorts of invented histories and traditions." Rana's memories, which she recollects repeating the phrase "I remember", are thus of the symbolic places that have made of Jerusalem the significant place that it is: a visit to the mosque of al-Aqsa where she "was fascinated by the grandeur of the Dome of the Rock as it proudly basked in the sun that made it look even more beautiful", a prayer rug, Nabulsi Kunafa, "an Arab Palestinian dessert", and the gates. This imagined paradise characterised by its assumed "serenity, purity, genuineness, originality" is a nostalgic narrative, an homage to a past that may have never existed. Said (2000, 179) explains how such modes of "collective refashioned memory" are important for a people to "give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world, though, as I have indicated, the processes of memory

are frequently, if not always, manipulated and intervened in for sometimes urgent purposes in the present." Rana's vision of Jersualem, for example, also conceals the present reality of Jerusalem, one of the most controversial locations in Palestine, where religious and cultural conflict can easily unfold. It is a city of immediate contradictions that are often obscured by a mythicised past. The photo inserted with the blog by Rana offers a panoramic view of the three symbols of monotheistic religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism represented by the Dome of the Rock, the church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Wailing Wall. The present colonial struggle that aims at singling out those of a different ethnicity is totally absent in her narrative of the past, however.

"When Memory and Reality Meet: On My Identity"

In April 2013, Rana writes a blog entitled "When Memory and Reality Meet" (see Appendix A: Figure 4). Rana shifts from a narrative in which the collective memory of a pre-Nakba Palestine shapes her consciousness of her national identity and belonging to one in which her present fragmented reality and sense of dislocation invokes questions about what 'watan' or homeland is. Rana writes:

> I have grown exceedingly intolerant of the irreconcilable fact that while I was
> born, and have always lived, in Gaza, I am also Palestinian, meaning that I come
> from Palestine too. And while I have always sung for the watan, the homeland,
> every day in the morning as a schoolchild and every now and then as something
> of an adult, it only existed in the form of images that I managed to extract from
> the texture of memory bequeathed to us through oral and written biographies
> and more recently through the experiences of acquaintances in the unreachable
> parts of Palestine.

In this blog, Rana revisits her previously unquestioned understanding of her national identity and its relation to memory and place. Rana acknowledges that the pre-Nakba Palestine, 48 Palestine, has been so important to the constitution of her national identity that it results in a constant feeling of dislocation. Being in Gaza, yet being denied access to other parts of Palestine, activates a sense of exilic experience and dislocation, and an aspiration to return to a 'whole' that no longer exists in reality. Rana's isolation in Gaza thus activates her exilic experience and her desire to reunite with the homeland, or the motherland, and to an inaccessible homeland that "strangely feel closer and warmer to her than Gaza, her birthplace." For "Gaza is not Palestine, it is not my homeland". This conveyes a sense of the ongoing rupture that results in a continuous search for a 'home', even if physically, by virtue of being in Gaza, Rana still lives in part of this "homeland".

In this blog, Rana explains what happens when identity clashes with reality. In her earlier narratives, Rana constructed her self as a woman who asserted her Palestinianness through a celebration of a collective memory of Palestine passed on her by her grandmother, never questioning her belonging to those places she has not herself experienced. However, Rana's long-held conception of what makes a homeland is disrupted over dinner one night in Turkey, when she finally meets with Palestinians from other parts of Palestine, and fails to engage in a conversation about Yaffa Street in Jerusalem. This failure to intimately identify and recall an embodied experience of those places invokes a rather unstable sense of the homeland.

> It was only when the young women started discussing events that took place
> on Share' Yaffa, a famous street in Jerusalem known as Jaffa Road, that I started
> to feel like an outsider to the conversation. I sat back, and, with utter discomfort
> and agitation, I listened carefully, trying to gather what this road is like and
> where in Jerusalem it is located. The more the road was mentioned and

passionately spoken about, the further I felt from myself, and worse, my Palestinian identity.

In this way, then, Rana shifts towards admitting a distinct present reality characterised by a sense of alienation. Yet, she still perceives that sense of fragmentation characterising Palestinian contemporary exilic reality and a direct result of "Israel's policies of separation" as a threat because it can "annihilate any sense of unity." Therefore, her narratives still preserved the wish to melt "the various identities … into one."

In a blog she wrote in August, 2013, entitled "Finding my way to Palestine through Narrative", Rana's continuous search for home drives her to investigate more deeply into her "ancestral history." The narratives of her grandmother Nadera become more than evidence of a shared past and a collective national history. Rana writes that "for years, my grandmother's stories offered a cocoon within which I could enjoy a Palestine that is now distant in time and physically unknown to me." However, this matrilineal narrative is further complicated when Rana unfolds a personal family history that exposes a far from unified "homogenous" Palestinianness. In this way, both Nadera's narratives as well as Rana's online narratives help in shifting and deconstructing her "long-held conception of what makes a homeland." Through tracing her family's past, Rana takes the reader to the living room of her grandmother's house, where "a large photo frame of [her grandmother's] grandfather in a *tarbush* – a fez – and enormous arched moustache, hangs on the wall." Rana's great-grandfather was a Turk "who served as an officer in the Ottoman army", and whose presence in Palestine is evidence of a long history of shifting borders and colonial encounters which shaped Palestine's history. Rana concludes her blog as follows:

This time a new dimension has been added to my identity; somehow, I too am the product of a marriage, perhaps a love story, between a colonizer and

colonized… Rediscovering Palestine through narrative and writing it down is, I

believe, crucial to ensuring that Palestine is not erased.

Rana's narratives shift from expressing a simple understanding of national identity as a product of a shared memory, a shared history, and a unified story of the nation. These narratives engender memory by celebrating the distinct and hybrid nature of her ancestral history as a Palestinian. In this way, she somehow asserts a vision of Palestinianness in which her ancestral history of hybridity disturbs an otherwise unitary story of the nation.

Reham's Blog

In a blog entitled "Embracing the Land," by Reham Alhelsi (July 2011), whose blogs are mostly situated or narrated from Al-Dheisha refugee camp in the West Bank, a portrayal of the land destabilises the traditional gendered nationalist representation of Palestine as the motherland. Reham starts her blog by describing the morning rituals of an unidentified male figure in what seems like a contemporary peasant setting: "Every morning he wakes up, prays, prepares tea, carries the old tea pot and a small glass and goes to check on his trees and plants." He is described as a "villager, a farmer, a land-worker, and a land-lover" just like his "father, grandfather, and forefather" who through the act of planting the land created "a paradise, a home." The construction of home is performed through the act of planting the land which is described as carried out by the patriarchal fatherly lineage. Later on, the narrator reveals the setting to be of an unidentified urban refugee camp in the West Bank:

> I watched him: an old man, over 60… his face wrinkled with the marks of the
>
> Nakba, the Naksa, the Intifadas and all that is in-between … his eyes windows
>
> to a village not far away, yet so far away, a green village which decades in
>
> colourless UNRWA rooms could not erase or replace.

Reham's use of rural imagery demonstrates the significant role the peasantry has been ascribed in Palestinian nationalist narratives, where (as I explored in detail in the previous chapter) peasants who were closest to the land provided figurative significance to nationalist discourse and its relation to land and territory.

As the narrative recalls this man's act of planting the land and creating this home, the text is loaded with traditional, gendered representations of what the land represented for Palestinians. Recalling this era, Reham writes that "they lived on the land and from her and they gave the land their love, watered her with their sweat and their blood, honoured her, and the land gave them food on their tables, a sanctuary and a home." The land is typically perceived in feminine terms; it is the recipient of a man's love and is portrayed as the beloved; it is the object of the men's protection as they have the need to "honour" it. However, it is very important to note that Reham's evocation of such traditional representations of the land creates a vision of home as it was before the land was lost, or rather "raped." The home signified as Paradise is a reference to Palestine as it exists in the collective memory of every Palestinian.

This act of fixing time through returning to a certain point in time, the pre-Nakba idealised settings of the past, is interrupted by the setting of the blog post itself, the Dehesha refugee camp. As we, readers, climb the stairs of an UNRWA house, "two rooms built by the UNRWA, which with time, expanded and grew, just like the family inhabiting these two rooms" we see the working of time, the destabilisation of a past romanticised life, as we are taken from the "heaven of home" to the roof of an UNRWA building in a refugee camp in the West Bank. The roof is "transferred to a garden of sort… no, not a garden, but to Zakariya."[18] Existence, for Palestinians, means recreating the space which connected them as a nation, a national endeavour to remain connected with a land that they no longer possess. Even in a cramped urban neighbourhood, men still recreated these rural settings. Reham writes:

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[18] Zakariya was a Palestinian village ethnically cleansed in 1948. Today, in place of Zakariya stands the Israeli settlement of Zakharya to the north west of Hebron.

He had carried that village with him, within him, all these 63 years of wandering.

He is still wandering, and won't stop until his feet take him back to his village.

This refugee camp is a temporary stop, a forced stop, but never a home. It was

never and will never be a substitute to the home from which he and the thousands

of thousands of refugees were all expelled, it was never and will never be a

home. It is simply a refugee camp; a refugee camp, not a home.

Despite the constant reference to the fact that those gardens are not "a substitute to the home," they were "never and will never be a home." They are "a refugee camp", "not a home." However, there is a relentless need to recreate this lost home and paradise somewhere, somehow. Over the rooftops of a house in a refugee camp, in the stories from a memory from the past, in the narratives on the online space, home is reconstructed.

Reham's writing reconstitutes spaces, in which men still function as the patriarchs, in which Palestine is still portrayed as the motherland, in which the soil, the land (the mother), produces the nation's children. There is a recurrent image of the land as the beloved or the motherland, as the blogger narrates the past. But in her portrayal of the present, the man is the exiled son, who is yearning to return to his "mother" or "motherland." Somehow, this temporal state of exile has disfigured the image of the peasant patriarch.

But Reham's narrative does not simply reproduce such gendered images; later in the narrative, she juxtaposes this figure of the old man with the figure of her mother. She writes:

I thought of my mother, a refugee, who has changed one part of our land into a

jungle. She did not leave one spot without planting a fruit tree, an olive tree, a

citrus tree, a flower or a herb bush, you just name it.… Now, we have a garden

with plants from everywhere, an international garden, a solidarity garden; a

garden that mixes Palestinian plants with solidarity plants from all over the globe.

She presents us with a figure of a woman, a refugee, reconstructing a home in the present, a home of a different nature with a different vision. It is not one that assumes its exclusionary patriarchal nature, and portrays the land in its femininity, but one that sees home as comprising a global heterogeneity, where Palestine is not reduced to its men, but is capable of accommodating difference and diversity. Reham's narrative does allegorise a traditional nationalist vision of home: a home portrayed as a mother "that needs her children around her and the more the better" (Reham July 2011), a home portrayed as a woman who is able to produce and reproduce the nation. But it also, and importantly, presents an alternative vision of home as well, a home capable of multicultural inclusion, a home of solidarity. In Reham's description of the "international garden" and the idea of this garden as Zakariya, what her mother is creating is simultaneously localised and global. The same can be said about the blogs examined in this chapter, where the personal, local and the global intersect.

Chapter 6.   Crossing Borders

I smiled, tried to forget that we're going to be talking about the border, tonight, in bed. I tried to forget that the border is going to interfere in the most intimate moments of our life, and that I would be getting married and think of borders at the same time. I tried to forget that for the past month , it's all what we've been talking about, whether we're going to spend our honeymoon, together, somewhere else, or not.

(Sameeha Elwan September 2013)

Since its emergence as a site of cultural analysis, the border has been one of the most explored spaces in postcolonial feminist theory. As Ball argues, postcolonial feminist theory is interested in the "margins, edges or boundaries of social representational structure in order to challenge the dominant and centralised paradigms of the various power/knowledge systems, including those of postcolonialism and feminism as disciplines" (Ball 2012, 101). In this sense, borders not only function as dividing lines and points of rupture for notions of space and time, but they have been viewed as "ambivalent spaces" (Anzaldúa 1987) and imagined as a "privileged locus of hope for a better world" (Michaelsen and Johnson 1997, 2-3), since they "not only separate but also forge connections between two or more spaces, cultures, or subject-positions" (Ball 2012, 101).

As discussed in the beginning of this thesis, borders and border encounters take up a significant space in the Palestinian imagination because the Palestinian landscape is overlaid with various forms of colonial territorial barriers, including checkpoints, roadblocks, and a separation wall, among others. Simultaneously, however, Palestine remains with no determined national borders. Therefore, these sites of confrontation and containment are reminders of Palestinians' everyday humiliation as they wait, suspended, restrained and uncertain, subject to arbitrary body inspections and paper checks.

In this chapter, I explore Palestinian women bloggers' online narratives of 'border crossing', as they pertain to both territorial borders resulting from the colonial experience of Palestinians, from both the boundaries of collective national identity as well as the literal act of crossing or attempting to cross these boundaries. In light of the postcolonial feminist assumption of the border as both a colonial and a metaphorical construct, I analyse a selection of blogs, which narrate and re-imagine women's experiences of border crossing in the context of Palestine. I illustrate the ways in which these narratives both represent and negotiate collective suffering through the narration of the stories of individual bloggers. Thus, I argue that Palestinian women can cross colonial and (nationalist, patriarchal, collective) boundaries (at least metaphorically) through asserting an authoritative subjective voice in their online blog narratives through both a literal and an imagined act of border traversal. These narratives give voice to the personal, which can denaturalise the representation of group suffering at colonial borders, and thereby complicate collective identities through highlighting the different determinants and power structures operating within them.

In the first section of the chapter, I explore the main notions of the border within postcolonial feminist theory which inform my analysis of the border space as that narrated in the blogs selected here. I draw on the work of Anzaldúa (1987) and Avtar Brah (1996) to read the border as both a material and a metaphorical concept. Further, the works of Achille Mbembe (2004) and Lindsey Bremner (2005) inform my understanding of borders and bodily encounters within colonial contexts. Discussions of the borders in the contexts of the Apartheid system in South Africa have been helpful to my analysis as they situate the concept of the border to the colonial context of subjugation as experienced daily by Palestinians. Mbembe and Bremner unfold similar bodily encounters with those spatial colonial borders. I also employ Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou's (2013) theorisation of performativity enacted in those spaces of subjugation and the forms of agency and resistance that they allow for. In the second section of

the chapter, I engage directly with blog narratives of border crossing, which are set at the material border or the checkpoint. I do this through an analysis of selected blogs by Rana Baker and Linah Saafin.

Rana Baker, as I explained in the previous chapter, grew up in the Gaza Strip during the period when the "Erez Crossing", was mostly closed and when permits, issued to less than five percent of the population, were needed to cross this point into Israel, or into the West Bank or into the outside world through Jordan.[19] Many of Rana's blogs are thus preoccupied with the space of the border. Blog posts such as "Crossing to Cairo: a Palestinian Diary" (2014), "A humiliating start to my first tour of Palestine" (2013) and "My Jerusalem diaries" (2010) are all personal posts written by Rana in her documentation of the attempts she made to cross to the West Bank, Israel, or through Rafah to leave Gaza. Borders, in her context and from her location as a writer born and raised in the Gaza Strip, are largely perceived not as crossing points but as sites of confinement, immobility, and imprisonment. Rana's narratives thus highlight the sense of humiliation suffered by Palestinians on a collective level as they cross these borders, but these narratives also exhibit a highly subjective voice, which not only questions colonial borders and their violence against the gendered bodies of the colonised women, but also questions national boundaries themselves. Rana's checkpoint narratives offer a subjective voice, which complicates notions of national collectivity through narratives of identity performance in relation to both the colonial and the national sides of the border. Rana's account of the border as a 'colonial encounter' dramatises how the checkpoint as an apparatus of power inscribes this

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[19] Gaza has two major borders controlling the movement of people in and out of the Gaza Strip. First is the Israeli controlled Erez crossing, which allows access to a very limited number of Palestinians and functions under a system of permits, unavailable to more than 95% of the population. According to Gisha (Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement), after January 1991, Israel introduced a new system of individual exit permits for the residents of the Gaza Strip to access or leave the Palestinian territories through Israel. In 1995, Israel built a concrete wall and an electric fence around the Gaza Strip, introducing new closure measures. After the break of the Second Intifada in 2000, Israel significantly minimised the number of exit permits issued to residents of the Gaza Strip and the Erez crossing was frequently closed. The Second major crossing is the Egyptian Rafah Border, which has been frequently closed since 2006.

power on her gendered body and determines her identification within this space. Through Rana's blog, we see how narratives of borders within the Palestinian context can work against some of the utopian visions of the border within postcolonial feminist theory, which, as outlined above, tend to view the border as a potentially productive space of human and cultural exchange.

Linah's Saafin started her blog entitled, "Life on Bir Zeit Campus", while a student at Bir Zeit University in the West Bank. The blog includes narratives posted between 2010 and 2012, after which Linah pursued a career in journalism. Similar to Mariam's blog from the West Bank, many of Linah's entries record her witness narratives of her own participation as an activist in the Nabi Saleh protests. Through her narrative, Linah crosses many metaphorical borders. Her narratives reflect on her infiltrating on-the-ground spaces of resistance that are often dominated by gendered metanarratives of honour and protection. The blog provides segments of her life as an activist and her various encounters with Israeli soldiers at protests, as she challenges their illegal presence in the village. Her blogs also cross internal national boundaries as she provokes conversations about the failing role of the Palestinian National Authority in offering any promising framework for liberation or decolonisation of her people; thus, the blogs articulate stories of dissent that operate within the national space itself. But as readers learn about Linah's life as it unfolds in her online narratives, the colonial borders materialise as a vicious reality which has resulted in a family history of separation for her. In Linah's narrative of border crossing, we, therefore, see the intersection of the material violence of the colonial border with the metaphorical and imaginative act of border traversal through her humorous accounts of resistance to an otherwise devastating experience of humiliation and subjugation.

Theorising the Border

Since the 1980s, the rapid increase in global migration has prompted an interest in the border as a (cultural) space of transnational and hybrid possibilities. In her article "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities," Brah (1996, 625) emphasises the importance of the border as "a political construct as well as an analytical category" (615) to the understanding of concepts of diaspora and migration (613). In this sense, borders are viewed as spaces of mobility allowing for "analyses of contemporary trans/national movement of people, information, cultures, commodities, and capital." Brah (1996, 613) defines borders as:

> arbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic; territories to be patrolled against those whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others; forms of demarcation where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression; zones where fear of the Other is the fear of the self; places where claims to ownership – claims to 'mine, 'yours' and 'theirs' – are staked out, contested, defended, and fought over.

As such, these borders can take on a metaphorical quality and become "part of the discursive materiality of power relations" (Brah 1996, 613). In a similar vein, Anzaldúa theorises the border in both material and discursive terms as a metaphor for social, psychological, sexual and spiritual limits. Borderlands, according to Anzaldúa, "are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (Anzaldúa 1987, 19). Anzaldúa's *borderland* offers important insights for all women who live on the fringes of multiple struggles. From her US-Texas-Mexican geographical locale, Anzaldúa's feminist text questions the designated cultural role of women

as "border guards" within a community with a tradition of male domination.[20] In Anzaldúa's account, the *mestiza*, the border woman or the woman of the margin, moves across the borders towards a "new mestiza consciousness," a consciousness that holds within "a tolerance for ambiguity" (Anzaldúa 1987, 101; emphasis in original), claiming a certain ambivalent space. Anzaldúa's classic text is thus important in reading other subaltern testimonial narratives by women whose lives are defined by multiple limitations across different geographical locales. Through laying claim to all parts of her identity which she views as a complex construct that comprises multiple elements that refuses to be reduced to any static essentialist category, she "envisions one provisional whole where she can "stand and claim [her] space, making a new culture" (Anzaldúa 1987, 5).[21]

In colonial situations, borders are literal as well as metaphorical, as they mainly operate as a form of binary demarcation testifying to both the real and symbolic power, authority and sovereignty of one nation over another. Mapping spaces, through creating many forms of physical barriers, of which the checkpoint is one prominent example designed to control the movement of colonised people, is essential in exercising colonial power. Those ruptures of everyday life also function as another form of dispossession, which in colonial and settler colonial contexts, according to Butler and Athanasiou (2013, 11), "work as an authoritative and often paternalistic apparatus of controlling and appropriating the spatiality, mobility,

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[20] Anzaldúa's account was part of the rise of identity politics in the 1980s and 1990s in the USA. It was an attempt to claim a space for feminist voices reflective of the interests and needs of women from culturally diverse backgrounds aiming to 'speak back' to western liberal feminist ideas.

[21] Whereas in the majority of the works in postcolonial theory which takes the border as its point of departure including works of Anzaldúa, Hicks and others, the border as a locale is almost undoubtedly presented as site of "politically exciting hybridity, intellectual creativity, and moral possibility," (Michaelson and Johnson 1997, 3) and though none of these scholars would neglect the severe violence, especially in the context of the US-Mexico borders which these geographies entail, the space is portrayed as rather promising. It is thus important to stress that borders within the Palestinian context are constant reminders of the colonial reality and the daily border encounters mainly result from the hundreds of forms of borders erected in the lives of Palestinians; they thus differ hugely in this regard from "borderline" areas. These borders as previously illustrated take many forms, of which the borderline is but one. Other forms include the wall, the checkpoints, the roadblocks, the settler-only roads. These spaces, however, can hold within them interesting possibilities for unsettling the power dynamics, for agency, and for encounters between the self and the other.

affectivity, potentiality and relationality of (neo)colonized subjects." Tawil-Souri (2011, 21) explains the structure of the checkpoint as follows:

> The checkpoint is made up of an immobile mass—even if it changes and grows over time: turnstiles, concrete blocks, buildings, computers, lamp -posts, surveillance cameras, and the like. But the checkpoint also functions very much as a space in which mobility is stopped, or slowed down. In other words it functions as a barrier, not just a gateway.

But whereas checkpoints, as forms of colonial borders, are structured as apparatuses of segregation and separation, especially within colonial contexts, they are also inevitably spaces of encounter and contact: "forms of demarcation where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression" (Brah 1996, 625). The checkpoint becomes a space of subjugation and the colonial exercise of power, as the colonisers project or "inscribe" their power on the gendered bodies crossing this peculiar space. The construction of the colonised body as an object of inspection and as a threat that needs to be examined, whether covered or naked, with identification documents or without, reflects what Mbembe (2004) refers to as the memorialisation of power on the bodies of the colonised, a process he also refers to as "graphism." In the context of Apartheid in South Africa, graphism "consisted in tracing marks on the body and on the territory. It also entailed various acts of coding and inscription [and] … was enacted through small gestures of everyday life." Mbembe connects the inscription of power through the mapping of the space to the bodies of the colonised, which he sees as the main site of inscription.[22] Within such a context of racialised discrimination, the skin was an

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[22] In his article "Aesthetics of Superfluity", Mbembe (2004) explores the construction of the city of Johannesburg as a centre for metropolitan modernity in the late nineteenth century, leading to the years of the Apartheid in South Africa, with racism being "constitutive dimension of the city's modernity". Mbembe explains Apartheid's construction of race and its relation to power, labour, space and the subjectivity of the colonised, whose "native life … was indispensable and expendable" (Mbembe 2004 381). Apartheid, according to Mbembe (2004, 388–389), "operated as a 'machine' that was both territorial and deterriotorializing. … Deterritorialization involved the appropriation of land, the disassembling of older territorial linages, the formation of neo-territories and artificial

important signifier, which assigned the moving bodies of the colonised into certain places and denied their access to others. Bremner (2005) suggests that "Apartheid operated as a bio-politics of discrimination and disqualification at the level of the skin. The skin was the site where the categories of violence associated with borders were performed." Mbembe (2004) argues:

> The skin was a moving signifier—a wall, so to speak—that located one in space, that granted or denied access, that opened or closed doors, that determined where or with whom one might socialize, work, shop, or fornicate. One carried it around with one. It regulated multiple regimes of covalent bonds and circulations and kept the moving body in its place simultaneously.

Central to the mapping of the border, therefore, is the mapping of the body. Nayak (2003, 9) argues that mapping borders and bodies is dependent on "the mystery, eroticism, darkness, defilement, and danger of the Other", all of which Said, in *Orientalism,* mentioned as the fixed "deep and recurring image of the Other." Borders, in colonial contexts, are important in the identification of the other, as they operate as spaces where the gendered bodies of the colonised are both othered and dehumanised. These sites of precarity aim at constraining mobility of colonised bodies as well as forcing the body into often intimate and close encounters with its 'self' and the 'other.' They are spaces where the gendered body is exposed to the manifestations of colonial power. Therefore, daily border encounters in colonial contexts, such as Palestine, produce sites of collective subjugation and vulnerability. They are also sites where identity has to be performed in determined, prescribed ways that have come to constitute the 'normal' within such contexts. Butler (2013, 12) argues that "the coercive exposure of bodies at checkpoints and other sites of intensified surveillance" invites a certain performance or "presence." She (2013, 12-13) explains:

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enclaves, and their overcoding and progressive transformation into fragments and scattered partial forms hanging on the state's body."

The body must arrive, present itself for inspection and move only according to

the motion and speed required by the soldier or the machine (or the soldier-

machine hybrid). The person who must pass through the checkpoint is "present"

in a way that is bound up with subjugation. But, similarly, when acts of

resistance happen at the checkpoint, when bodies show up or move through in

ways that are not allowed, or when communities form on either side to limit and

counter military practices, a kind of presence occurs.

Unsettling the Border Performance

Through their urgency as short narratives which recount actual experiences of border crossing,

the blogs explored in this chapter provide a timely response to an experience of subjugation,

and thus provide the possibility of resistance. The blog is a creative space of resistance and an

imaginative redressing of the oppression actually negotiated. Against the normalcy of the

everyday offline border encounter, which has permeated the lives of Palestinians, these border

narratives can work to denormalise the daily performance of border crossing in the Palestinian

context. These blogs can act in similar ways to other Palestinian checkpoint narratives,

mediated through films or literature,[23] and aimed at making strange the checkpoint encounter

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[23] In Palestinian cultural, literary and filmic representation of the checkpoint, the space can figuratively function as a "rite of passage" through which returnees to Palestine have to pass to reach an altered Palestinian landscape from the one they have imagined through narration or previous lived experiences. This is a similar process to that explored in the narratives of the previous chapter. Such a portrayal can be found in Mourid Barghouti's narrative of return, *I saw Ramallah*. Also, in Raja Shehada's *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (2007), the representation of borderlines as obstructions to the right to movement can be seen in Shehada's negotiation of the changed landscape which has become isolated Palestinian enclaves due to the construction of Israeli checkpoints, roadblocks and an expanding network of settler-only bypass roads, and finally the "separation wall." In Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015), the "blue" refers to a space where control and borders have no power. The checkpoint can also function as a site of resistance. A recent representation can be found in *Sharon and My Mother in Law* by Suad Amiry (2005)[23], who uses humour to deconstruct the power balance and to manipulate the law of the checkpoint to her own interest as well as to hint at the "disjunctive subjectivities of the colonized" (Moore-Gilbert 2014, 198) produced as a result of those physical barriers. For example, in her diaries written during the Israeli curfew imposed on Ramallah in 2003, Amiry (2005) tells the story of the way she managed to cross the checkpoint from Ramallah to Jerusalem (which she cannot access as she is denied the permit) as a driver to her dog "Noura," who ends up with an Israeli passport, which allows "Noura", thus herself as Noura's driver, to cross the Qalandia checkpoint freely into Jerusalem.

"by enacting a conscious destabilization of the performativity of the 'checkpoint narrative' itself" (Ball 2014, 83). An analysis of online narratives of border crossing can illustrate the ways in which bloggers choose to destabilise the normalised representation of the checkpoint as a story of collective suffering through a focus on the experience of the "I". The blogger's recounting of the experience does uncover a specific power dynamic that may barely be challenged in the experience itself while an individual is crossing the border alone or as part of the collective. Thus, the recording of the experience, from the perspective of the margin or the vulnerable, allows the blogger to speak back to and disrupt that binary dynamic of the 'coloniser in power' and the 'vulnerable colonised.' The blogs become a space for both representation and resistance.

These online narratives of border crossing thus become another form of resistance, one often not materialised while performing the crossing itself. They can thus function as a form of "presence", or as the "making present" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013) through narrative from the perspective of the margins, 'an account of the colonised.' In this way, narratives of the border can function as a form of resistance that voices the implied "presence" which accompanies the experiences of a subject's physical exposure. The limitation over agency and the right to speak up or to protest against the unnecessarily bureaucratic and somehow 'normalised' procedures that Palestinians have to go through silently can also be contested in online spaces. These online spaces provide a certain mobility otherwise denied to Palestinians offline, and Palestinian online narratives of the border can be read as a "refusal to stay in [their] proper place" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 21).

Rana's Checkpoint Narrative

"A Humiliating Start to my First Tour of Palestine"

In 2014, Rana and I crossed the Erez checkpoint together after obtaining Israeli permits to participate in a three-day leadership workshop organised by the American consulate in the West Bank. The permit granted us, as Palestinians from Gaza, the right to stay in and move around the West Bank and Israel through the designated checkpoints and border points for a few days. For the first time in my life, at the age of twenty-five, I was allowed to step outside the Gaza Strip through the Erez crossing and to visit the West Bank. The intense experience at Erez, crossing Qalandia checkpoint for the first time, touching a separation wall which seemed to block the horizon, and walking the streets of Jaffa left me with mixed feelings. I was mostly angry and speechless. Even as a blogger, I could not put this experience into words. But Rana did.

Rana's blogpost "A humiliating start to my first tour of Palestine" (September 2013) is one of a series of posts written after she successfully toured the West Bank, Israel or 48 Palestine for the first time in her life for a few days after obtaining the required permits. The title of the blog contrasts with the first pictorial image she posts which depicts a sign at the crossing. Whereas the sign itself reads as "Welcome to Israel," Rana's blog title makes reference to this space as "Palestine". So, Rana's narrative unsettles the border's function as a demarcation line that divides the space into 'what is theirs' and 'what is ours.' Rana instead views the border crossing as a transition from the confined space of Gaza to a larger vision of Palestine, and not entry to Israel. In this sense, her narrative problematises borders as they relate to delineating borderlines between two national spaces. These border spaces erected within the Palestinian landscape and established to divide "us" from "them" do not do so. They do not function as dividing lines between two ethnic and national boundaries. Rather, they assert that the space is one with

various national contestations. In this sense, Rana's failed attempts at crossing the Erez border over a number of years speak of how she perceived those borders as barriers between herself and her understanding of her national identity and what she defines as "home" or "Palestine." Rana explains:

> For years, I tried every way I could to get myself a permit, making up whole sets of pretexts, sometimes trying to convince old people I know into accompanying them on their visits to Hadassah, an Israeli hospital in Jerusalem, an offer they, knowing my intentions, always refused. I tried to reach out to doctors to persuade them, in vain, to write me medical reports that diagnosed the worst of illnesses in me, ones that required medication at Israeli hospitals.

Thus, in her account, there is a desire to cross those physical borders because only in crossing them can she experience the Palestine of the stories she has been told in search for her collective Palestinian identity. For years, those borders have resulted in a sense of dislocation, as Rana insists in many of her narratives, producing a fragmented identity. Rana writes, "for me it was a frantic search for a place where I could finally feel at home."

Narrative Performance of the Checkpoint Experience: The Borders Within

Another significant aspect of the image of the sign at Erez, which explicitly declares that "in order to make the crossing as easy as possible, please follow the instruction", is its clear imposition of a predetermined performance required to ensure an "easy" passage by Palestinians. Of course, that does not mean that passage is granted to a would-be traveller, even after following such instructions. In many cases, access is randomly obstructed or denied. Ball (2014, 75) explains that because of the prominence of checkpoints as an everyday Palestinian experience, the representation of checkpoints in most Palestinian narratives "have come to

prescribe predetermined 'scripts' to the performance of the checkpoint in a way that ... risks 'normalising' the checkpoint's operation as an everyday, even iconic feature of Palestinian existence." Ball goes on to argue that in their emphasis on the collective routine experience that the checkpoints impose on Palestinians, such representations somehow normalise the "enduring oddity and abnormality of the checkpoint within the Palestinian landscape" (Ball 2014, 76- 77). Nonetheless, she (2014, 83) argues that some checkpoint narratives mediated through films or literature can de-normalise the checkpoint encounter "by enacting a conscious destabilization of the performativity of the 'checkpoint narrative' itself." Building on her argument, I read Rana's narrative as a conscious choice to destabilise the otherwise naturalised collective understanding of the checkpoint through a focus on the experience of the "I", by means of which the collective experience of limitation and restriction is somehow both mediated and challenged in the personal, subjective telling of the experience of crossing this space. In doing so, Rana's narrative highlights not only the colonial borders that need to be crossed but the national boundaries as well.

Rana's border narrative does not start at the Israeli colonial checkpoint; rather, she chooses to start the narrative at the borders erected within her national space, and at the heart of home. Therefore, before narrating her encounter with the Israeli checkpoint, Rana recalls the various performances required to cross the two Palestinian border-control points to get to this colonial checkpoint. The border space as depicted in Rana's narrative expands its physical presence and its metaphorical meaning to include her encounter with boundaries constructed within Gaza, revealing another structure of immobility as it unfolds in the life of many Palestinians in Gaza, more specifically in the lives of women.

Rana explains these various identities she had to perform by taking the reader through the many stops she was required to make to get to the Israeli crossing point. The first stop is a recently established point of control run by the Hamas government in Gaza, another form of checkpoint

erected a few hundred metres before Israeli-controlled Erez. The existence of such a checkpoint can be explained in many ways, one of which is Hamas' wish to establish a degree of sovereignty over a geographical space under its control. This checkpoint can also act as a barrier and not a crossing point, as individuals must present to the Hamas officers their travel documents and the reason for their crossing. It is at this very early stage of her journey towards the checkpoint that Rana starts questioning the collective understanding of boundaries. Rana suspects that the man at the Hamas checkpoint is a foreigner, an Israeli soldier, based on his "foreign" appearance. It is only when the man speaks in Arabic, asking her why she is leaving Gaza, that she identifies him as Palestinian, still "answering the question in the most restrained language." This male figure symbolises the patriarchal boundaries imposed on women's mobility within the national space. In this space, she is perceived as a woman leaving the familial space of home; and in this way, she is already transgressing cultural boundaries by crossing the physical space alone. In this space, she also chooses not to reveal her connection to the American consulate: a Western entity that she expects would have been perceived as another boundary that she is crossing. Rana's performance at the checkpoint does not challenge the man's authority; rather, she acts amicably, chooses to be silent, and pretends to be completely apolitical. It is clear that she does so to protect herself from what she sees as "unnecessary interrogation" by those in control of the Hamas point about the purpose of her visit. Rana avoids suspicion as a political activist, or as having any formal or official connection with the American Consulate, because despite their lack of actual control over the border, the Hamas authorities have control over who actually reaches the Erez crossing, and thus they have the power to act not as a point of access but as a barrier to someone's progress, a similar function to the Israeli checkpoint. Hence, Rana, confusing the man at the Hamas point of control with an Israeli soldier, offers a subtle reflection on and a protest against such surveillance practices imposed by Palestinians over Palestinians and the absurdity of this checkpoint as another

structure of oppression. In this sense, her subjective voice questions those attempts at establishing increasingly restrictive national boundaries.

After passing through the Hamas-controlled point, she proceeds "to the second and final stop on the Palestinian side: the point administered by the Palestinian Authority." At this stage, Rana's fear of being associated with the American Consulate subsides, since she knows that in *this* space, the connection to that institution is considered a privilege, and will somehow give her a certain power, and facilitate her access. She therefore adopts a different rhetoric as she addresses the person in charge of this point, speaking in English, perceived to be the language of the elite. We see how, then, at specific points, Rana seeks protection by adopting different identities, none of which, she confesses, resembles her own self. She chooses to perform from within a position of privilege, knowing that this man who seems in control might have never crossed the borders himself, and is also besieged and imprisoned.

By opening her narrative of the border by describing this encounter with the Palestinian national boundaries, Rana highlights two contrasting performances within the national space, and thus reflects upon the ways in which women negotiate their way out of national boundaries. Rana subtly highlights women's entrapment between two contested nationalist narratives of 'modernity and tradition,' both operating simultaneously within the national space. One operates on the premise of false notions of modernity, "a masculinist discourse of nationhood in which women once again play no more than a symbolic function, as icons of the 'modern, liberated nation'" (Ball 2012, 63).[24] Another positions women, as highly sanctified figures,

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[24] The tension created by nationalist movements' construction of women is best analysed in Partha Chatterjee's study of nationalism in the subcontinent of India. His study gives an example of how most 'third-world' nationalisms constructed the women as the bearers of tradition and as the producers of pure national identities vis-à-vis the colonizers'. According to Chatterjee (1993a), nationalists made a distinction between a public space and a private one. For them, the public space represented the material that was inspired by the West's modern science, technology and rational forms of economic organisation. On the other hand, nationalists believed the power of the East lay in the realm of the spiritual. In India, the distinction between the material and the spiritual was for the nationalists the difference between the outer and the inner, the public and the private. The outer space was the material while the inner was the spiritual. The inner spiritual space for the nationalists was perceived as the distinct and true identity of the nation. Therefore, during the period of the anti-colonial national struggle in India, the nationalists needed to identify this distinction in order to construct the foundation of their own national identity. It

within religious and traditional discourses as occupying the private space and confined to the national private space. But once Rana leaves that space of national and patriarchal watch as a woman, she is still under the surveillance of the colonial border structure, where her body is engendered according to her national identity as a Palestinian.

"Whose Place is This?"

Following the Palestinian Authority's stop is a 1.5 km. long tunnel, which leads to the Israeli crossing. Rana writes that "electric carts were available to carry passengers to the gate, but I, insisting that I 'live the experience' and 'document,' decided to walk." Rana here is self-conscious about her role as a writer. Her decision to lengthen her experience of border crossing by walking rather than using the electric cars provided to passengers is similar to her conscious decision to provide a detailed narrative of the experience to invoke the complexity of her singular experience as a border-crosser. Rana's attempt to chronicle her encounter with the border space alludes to its centrality to her experience as a Palestinian. Yet, Rana's narrative of the material border space invokes the metaphorical and symbolic quality of the border space as well. Rana writes:

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is the inner, the private, the home that represented this sanctified national identity. Chatterjee (1993) writes that for the nationalists: "The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world-and woman is its representation." In her study of the early Palestinian nationalist movement in the early twentieth century and its construction of new women, Fleischmann (2003, 64) points to the same tension at the heart of Palestinian nationalism between modernity and tradition. She writes, "Third World, notes a 'new consciousness' about women during this period. The new bourgeois man, himself a product of Western education or missionary influence, needed as his partner a 'new woman', educated in the relevant foreign language, dressed in the new styles and attuned to Western ways—a woman who was 'presentable' in colonial society yet whose role was primarily in the home. At the same time, the new woman's role was to act as guardian of national culture, indigenous religion and family traditions—in other words, to be both 'modem' and 'traditional'." These parameters and contradictions informed the debate on women in the Arab world. Massad (1995) explains that this tension was central to Palestinian nationalism even later during the Palestinian Intifada which was evident in the Intifada's communiques. With the rise of the influence of Hamas as a resistance movement and as a rising political faction, the term traditional was also connected to Islamic traditional thoughts in which the woman was also assigned a subordinate position, and her role was emphasised in the private sphere.

All of a sudden, I was walking a tunnel that was neither in Gaza nor Palestine. I was in the nowhere zone, marching a long path, summoning as much confidence as I could to offset the intimidation of cameras, walls and watchtowers that surrounded me.

This description of the border is the closest that Rana's account gets to a "borderland" narrative; this is a space that is "neither Gaza" where she has always lived, nor the "Palestine" she imagines as home. And though the tunnel here functions as a transitory space, a "nowhere zone", the transition is rather confronting. The border does not reduce the distance; nor does it promise human contact between the Palestinian 'self' and the Israeli 'other'. Rather, Rana's assumption that she would see an Israeli face to face is replaced by the inhumane "intimidation of cameras, walls and watchtowers." Therefore, the figurative meanings that Rana attaches to the space, her attempt at exploring the "personal and linguistic contradictions that accompanied [her] crossing of Erez", or even her attempt to resist the enclosure and immobility by choosing to walk, cannot be used to obscure the border's primary function as a means of political control and surveillance. In fact, Rana's border narratives aim at creating meaning through the intersection of the metaphorical and the material "real" functions of the border space.

Once Rana arrives at the Israeli checkpoint, the ambivalence of the space and her linguistic confusion, which began with the first stop at the Palestinian side of the checkpoint, intensifies. The checkpoint, usually represented as a site of confrontation, is here also a space of confusion and uncertainty. Distinctions are blurred in this space, where language is not a signifier of collective identity, as those speaking the same language (Arabic) might actually be part of the matrix of oppression. Rana writes:

I sneaked a picture of the sign or two, pulled my luggage and entered the "terminal." A wide empty hall, a row of tables, and a man behind them: a

Palestinian. I threw my suitcase before him and unzipped it with disgust. "Pictures are forbidden," he said rather authoritatively. "This is not their place, this is ours [I said "ours" thinking he was a poor Palestinian worker] and I can take pictures," I hit back. "Whose place is this?" he demanded, daring me to repeat my answer, which I, taken aback by his reaction, did not dare to repeat and murmured something instead.

Even at the Israeli side of the border, Rana's confusion about the identity of those in power persists. Whereas Arabic, the language Palestinians speak, is usually seen as a signifier of national identity, in *this* space, it is not. Rana's assertion of her ownership of this space is also contested by the authoritative rhetorical question, "Whose place is this?", which is left unanswered. Rana is unable to set a mode of identification that divides the 'self' from the 'other', and her attempts at identifying are based on clichéd and stereotyped images of the other. One of these images is highlighted in her confusion of the Palestinian security guard as an Israeli based on "his disposition with his green eyes, white skin and silky blond hair." This confusion is based on a conventional image of the Israeli other as being of foreign origin, mainly of European or American background. She makes another attempt at identification based on the concept of a shared language, "speaking Arabic", which also invokes another clichéd image of the Israeli other as one who is often not willing or not able to understand Arabic.

Rana's contestation and her claim to the ownership of the land—"this is ours"—is thus overpowered by the realisation that the man could be an Israeli. And while in her narrative of the encounter, Rana is able to reflect on questions of her national identity, the material encounter itself offers no such space for reflection. She again finds the need to suppress and self-censor her thoughts in order to pass through. Despite the questions evoked by the ambivalence of the space of the border, in Rana's narrative, this space is at once "all gray, empty and impersonal."

Bodies against Borders

In an earlier blogpost written in 2011, entitled "My Jerusalem Diaries" (May 2011), Rana's narrative of the checkpoint encounter focuses on the space as a colonial space of subjugation, a space of bodily encounter with the checkpoint constructed as a colonial apparatus of power. It is a personal testimony that reveals the vulnerability of the body of the Palestinian forced into contact with the border. In this blog, Rana recalls the time when she was allowed to visit Jerusalem as a teenager after obtaining a one-day permit. However, in order to arrive in Jerusalem, Rana had to go through 'the Erez' checkpoint. While being inspected at the crossing, she was subjected to a humiliating experience where she was singled out and strip searched. Rana (2011) writes:

> A long fenced road led to many searching machines at checkpoints. You must leave your luggage on the machine, take off anything that contains metal, even a necklace, and pass through the checkpoint. If it beamed, you're in trouble; if it didn't, go to the next. One machine was much larger than the ones I'd "gotten used to." It's the one with the X-rays that reportedly causes cancer. The one I had always heard about. Once I got inside it, a woman ordered through a loudspeaker to raise my hands and stand still. The machine too was bugged!

Rana was unable to fathom the reason behind her being prevented from going beyond the X-ray machine, which provokes her remark, "there was something wrong with me." This self-consciousness expresses the teenager's bewilderment and her attempt to understand the reason behind her sterile movement "in and out of the machine five times". When the machine continues to "beam red", Rana was "taken to a special room with a searching machine, a table, a female officer and a searching device on the table", and she was ordered to take off her pants. This act of undressing Rana of her cultural identity by stripping away her clothes was not

enough to confirm for the Israeli officers that she did not constitute a danger to Israel as she writes, "the device ran across my body. At that point I was wondering what one could hide under his/ her skin or underwear!" Identity here functions "at the level of the skin" similar to the context of Apartheid in South Africa, where the Apartheid system based its discriminatory policies on the skin as "a moving signifier", and where power was inscribed on the bodies of the colonised whether covered or naked as an example of Mbembe's "graphism."

Rana's bodily encounter with the border's apparatus of control thus subjects her body to a process of mapping. Similar to the mapping of the Palestinian landscape, manifested in the different borders constructed to control the space, Rana's body is mapped through a process of inscription. The fluidity of her identity is immobilised into one of its elements: her national identity, maintaining its 'defiling otherness.' Hence, Rana is constituted as a threatening other; the Israeli state's violence is thereby rationalised as a necessity. Rana's Palestinianness, which is written upon her body, invokes the oft-repeated images of the threat of both suicide bombers and the demographic bomb.[25] Rana's body subjected to full inspection also fixes its identity on the premise that the Palestinian female body is the bearer of a potential "demographic threat". The purported 'demographic war' between Palestinians and Israelis, where women's bodies are caught on both sides in a nationalist mission to reproduce new citizens, has fed into the Zionist Israeli state's reinforcement of the notion of an "Arab demographic threat," which is essentially inscribed in Palestinian bodies in general, and the female body in particular.

Violent Encounters

Contrary to the views of writers, such as Anzaldúa, who held out hope for a reimagined understanding of the border as a promising space for cultural encounters, the checkpoint as a

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[25] Since the emergence of the "war on terror", Israel has reproduced the US-inspired terminology, which positions any form of Palestinian resistance under the category of terror. Palestinians, previously represented as "Mukharibeen" or vandals in Zionist discourse, have been transformed into "terrorists".

literal space in the Palestinian context with its daily rituals of dehumanisation leaves very little space for a human encounter between Rana the Palestinian and the Israeli other. The checkpoint as a border space continues to function as a human barrier, which renders Palestinians invisible or, rather, non-existent, to which Rana's blog functions as a challenge. The proximity of the encounter does not promise a diminishing of the distance or rupture created by the physical border. In this context, the act of dehumanisation, which is usually practised by the coloniser is here a reflexive act of a mutual 'not seeing'. On the one hand, Rana literally cannot see the female soldier. She identifies her only as a "woman's voice with a distorted English accent", while the female soldier only sees Rana through the lenses of inspection machines. These machines, apparently installed for security reasons, act as barriers; they function as "a defence from seeing" (Razack 2010, 100).

Rana's depiction of "the other" is confined to the Israeli military figure, attesting to decades of separation which has reduced the possibility of narrating human encounters in those short narratives.[26] Rana writes that "for six years, I had not seen an Israeli face to face. I had only seen them shell places and people I knew from afar." But even when she does see them, her depiction is still reductive in its representation of the other. Her encounters with Israeli officers on the borders leads to a representation of a militarised non-empathetic image of the soldier, a

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[26]After 1967, the Palestinian literary production began to depict a more complex image of the Israeli soldier through a focus on the psychological and human aspect of Israeli soldiers' voices and characters. This was more prominent in the novel, an important form for the development of complex characters. Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* was one of the first Palestinian novels to depict Israeli characters without enmity, yet Kanafani's depiction of the Israeli other was criticised as creating a non-convincing character—a character designated to promote a certain ideology and political ideas. Similarly, in poetry, Mahmoud Darwish invokes the voice of the Israeli soldier as the victim of state violence. In the voice of an Israeli soldier, Darwish writes, "I dream of white lilies, streets of song, a house of light/ I need a kind heart, not a bullet. /I need a bright day, not a mad, fascist moment of triumph/ I need a child to cherish a day of laughter, not a weapon of war/I came to live for rising suns, not to witness their setting." However, the primary image of Israeli soldiers as reflected in blogs is the conventional image of the armed and militarised other in a uniform. The image, however, speaks to a present reality lived by the Palestinians which attest to the violence of the increasing number of border spaces erected within the landscape of Palestine. This tendency, as Nurith Gertz and George Khaleifi (2008, 8) argue, "is strengthened by the reality in which those under occupation, in fact, always encounter the representatives of the occupation, namely soldiers and settlers, rather than other segments of the Israeli population."

reminder of the power imbalance between the Israeli and the Palestinian subject. In her blogpost (2014), Rana writes of the Israeli soldiers she encounters in this space, "Israeli soldiers above looked down on us with scorn. A soldier in plain clothes and a heavy machine gun strapped around his body walked back and forth inspecting us, with his eyes, in the most humiliating manner possible." Rana's narration of the Israeli soldier speaks of the everyday nature of such militarised encounters and its normalisation, on both sides. Hardly any Palestinian bloggers discussed in this thesis see beyond this bureaucratic machinery, which results in both the dehumanisation of and an attempt to ignore the presence of the human other. A similar account of such confrontation can be later seen in Linah Al-Saafin's account of crossing the borders. Linah (September 2011) comments, "I treat the Israeli officials there like how I was once treated when I visited Yafa. I completely ignore them, answer monosyllabically, and think of them as invisible robots."

Linah's Border Narrative

"It's not fun crossing the border"

(Linah Al-Saafin September 2011)

In "Crossing Borders," (September 2011) Linah Al-Saafin also brings the experience of border crossing to the centre of her narrative through offering fragments of her multiple trips across Allenby Bridge crossing point and the multiple checkpoints across the West Bank. Linah gives a detailed description of the return trip from Ramallah to Allenby Bridge to cross to Jordan, an account in many ways similar to Rana's. Unlike Rana's performative stance, where she puts herself at the centre of the narrative, Linah chooses to present the reader with a detailed guide on how to cross the checkpoint as a "brown" Palestinian. By directly addressing the readers, Linah takes us on a long, tedious journey of the endless possibilities of crossing or denial that

apply to most Palestinians, including herself. Crossing the Qalandiya Checkpoint, the perilous drive to Jericho, arriving at Jericho and sitting at the filthy seats of the Palestinian side of the border, the bus trip from Jericho's border, waiting hours for the Israelis to open their gates, passing through the security detectors and the x-ray machines, having passports stamped and advancing to the Jordanian side, only to wait again before being allowed in are just some of the scenarios Linah records.

Crossing the borders for Linah means reuniting with her family. Linah's family is divided between the West Bank and Jordan after her father was found to hold a Gaza Identity card, "which meant that he cannot come back to the West Bank".[27] This fracturing of the family is a concrete example of how the borders act as spatial and social ruptures in Palestinians' everyday reality. Thus, crossing the border for Linah means the possibility of "indulging in a couple of weeks of family normalcy." As a result, Linah admits of the frequency of her border-crossing experiences as well as their enforced nature: "I've crossed the border way too many times for my liking." This speaks to my argument that to cross physical borders in Palestinian daily reality is far from a celebratory act of cultural border crossing. Rema Hammami (2015, 14) points out that border spaces "defy temporal boundaries and turn violence into an ongoing context in which lives are lived." Linah's blog narrative mirrors the spatial and temporal rupture caused by borders by introducing similar temporal discontinuities. These ruptures are further emphasised by Lina's satirical humour, which stands at odds with the violence of the checkpoint encounter. Despite the temporal linearity that characterises Linah's blog narrative, as she provides a detailed step-by-step guide to crossing the border as a Palestinian, there are abrupt transitions that distort this temporal line. The structure of Linah's narrative, thus, reflects explicitly on the temporal disruptiveness of coloniality and, more specifically, of border

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[27] This familial fragmentation echoes an on-ground territorial separation of the West Bank and Gaza, which were conceived as constituting the "promised Palestinian state" by the Oslo accords, by which the Palestinian authority was established to operate as sovereign. The border was thus intended to operate under the control of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

crossing. Those disruptions are the effect of her shifting the narrative voice from a second-person voice to the subjective "I", reflecting on her many experiences and memories of border crossing.

In fact, Linah starts her blog by narrating a personal story of border-crossing. The story starts at the Israeli side of the border, or rather in a cubicle, where she is undergoing a strip search. By setting the story behind the "dull curtain" covering the entrance of that cubicle, Lina uncovers one of the most humiliating but most private bodily encounters Palestinian women experience as they cross colonial borders: experiences that might not often be visually represented due to the perceived sanctity of Palestinian women's bodies as they are forced into nudity. She thus makes public what is meant to stay behind closed curtains to avoid shaming. Linah writes:

> I stared at the dull curtain in front of me. Moments later, a female Israeli security guard pulled the curtain back and entered the cubicle, drawing it to a close again. She had on plastic gloves and began patting me down, tapping my knees to stand more widely. She slipped her fingers through the top of the inside of my jeans, lest I should have anthrax rolled up in plastic baggies Velcroed there. She told me to take my shirt off. I stared at her, bewildered. She snapped her fingers impatiently. I slowly pulled off my sweater.

How and why Linah got to the cubicle is not revealed until much later in the narrative, where she once again disrupts her detailed guide on how to cross the border to refer to the time when she was picked for a "random Person Check". This, Linah declares, is "how I came to be staring at the curtain." In doing so, Linah brings the reader back to that first personal encounter referred to in the openning of her narrative between herself and an Israeli female "security guard."

Linah narrates a performance which reflects the power interplay at the checkpoint between the dominant soldier in power and the submissive Palestinian. The Israeli female officer is the agent of all commands, while Linah, with almost no control over her body, is the object of inspection. But this normalised performance is somehow challenged and undermined by Linah's subjective cynical voice. Her satiric reference to the threat her body might hide is an instance. The sarcasm is even more apparent when Linah narrates the conversation between her and the Israeli officer who commands her to take off her boots and scarf:

> "Ishlakhi bot."

> "I'm not taking my shoes off." And it's ishlahi you frosty robot, I silently added.

> Her eyes bore into mine. "You'll stay here forever if you don't."

> I kicked off my Chucks, cursing Theodor Herzl and his ruinous ideology.

> "Ishlakhi hijab."

> "No."

Linah's comments intersperse the one-sided imperative mode of the exchange with the soldier at the border. These comments, some of which are not spoken aloud at the checkpoint or are muttered silently, challenge the entrenched power relations at the borders, and give voice to Linah's silenced thoughts. For Linah, this space of narrative becomes her opportunity for voicing her cynicism about and resistance to the degrading position she is forced to occupy every time she has to cross the border and confront an Israeli soldier who is, apparently, the agent of all the orders. This mode of narration grants Linah the agency to construct a version or vision of reality in which she gains the power to say no. This refusal to conform to the demands of the soldier is an attempt to resume control over her own body by resisting submission to the

soldier's demands of "undressing" her cultural identity. Linah can unveil her thoughts in a space where she can end the conversation with a "no." Therefore, the blog acts as a site for the reclamation of her subjectivity in response to the attack on it through such experience of control. Her narrative therefore also acts as an expression of resistance, and she uses humour to reimagine or to imagine differently her sense of control over her self, and to open up a space of freedom in the blog where it is not available in the literal border encounter.

Despite this intimate violent encounter between Linah and the Israeli soldier at the border, Linah admits that she eventually had to submit to the soldier's commands. The conversation, which Linah narrates in her blog, blends both English, Arabic, and the soldier's broken Arabic. However, the soldier's efforts to cobble together different languages, which Linah ridicules, especially the Israeli soldier's use of Arabic, is not meant to highlight the possibility of bridging a cultural gap and is not the result of a hybrid identity that the border space has facilitated. Rather, it speaks to the very limited Arabic vocabulary that the Israeli soldiers learn in order to direct or instruct Palestinians during the checkpoint encounter. This language is mostly aimed at humiliating and silencing Palestinians. Linah ridicules this co-opting of the punitive terms of her native language and refuses to speak it to the Israeli soldier, choosing to narrate her part of the conversation in English.

Linah's narrative evokes the sense of contestation that pervades the checkpoint encounter, as Palestinians protest against their humiliation. Yet, the contestation often ends with submission to the soldier's demands. In defiance of such capitulation, Linah's narrative disrupts this demeaning performance of the crossing through her cynical voice. The humour thus works as a way of protesting against and contesting this subjugation, as well as of refusing to stay in her place. Linah writes:

> 'There's nothing underneath my hijab, just my hair!' Which, thanks to whatever
>
> pollutants your government puts in the water allocated to Palestinians, is

reducing it to a couple of strands. I pictured myself with only two strands on my head, like Homer Simpson, and giggled. Sighing, I unwrapped my hijab, thinking of this absolute unnecessary situation, and glared at the security agent. In less than half a second, she was out of the cubicle, taking my sweater, shoes, and whatever hidden security threats they so masterfully concealed… After ten minutes of staring at my socks and picturing the day the state of Israel gets slapped with karma, the security agent came back in, handed me my stuff and vanished for a coffee break.

This incident describing Linah's experience of being left semi-naked in a cubicle is an example of how at different points in her narrative, time seems to stretch arbitrarily to correlate to the deadly time of waiting at the borders. It is during those times of waiting that she mostly uses this inner cynical voice.

Linah's forensic detailing of the journey, like Rana's blog narrative, also moves between national and colonial borders. Linah cannot ignore the fact that the Palestinian presence over the border serves as an attempt to distract from Israel's real and dominant exercise of power. Palestine's supposed state borders, the ultimate symbol of state sovereignty, become a cynical reminder of the absence of both the nation-state and sovereignty. Linah writes:

Once you reach Jericho, you arrive at the Palestinian side of the border crossing. This merely serves as a prelude to the Israeli side, since they are the ones who actually control the border. If there are a lot of people, you wait in the resting/lounge room which has some of the filthiest seats I've ever seen … Two large framed posters of Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas, each striking a similar pose, smile deprecatingly at the travellers. The Palestinian officials

behind the counter stamp your passport and you're traveling without a matriarch,

strike up a conversation.

The reduction of the two presidential figures of the Palestinian Authority "Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas", the two most prominent figures of Palestinian politics, into a framed poster is a satirical comment on their irrelevance to the Palestinian reality as they represent Palestinians' disappointment in both men's inability to offer a concrete resolution for their people. This can also be read as a dissatisfaction with a national vision of a Palestinian state with no actual border control, where Israel's control over the space is concealed with a sham Palestinian presence. Similar to Rana's encounter with national borders, Linah, "traveling without a matriarch" brings back the question of her gendered identity as a woman crossing national borders, alone.

These simple acts of disruption that sometimes take place at checkpoints and destabilise an otherwise routine performance of border crossing by Palestinians are thus highlighted in the online narratives of Palestinian women bloggers. The examination of borders on a solely aesthetic metaphorical level risks effacing and sidelining the very real and material effects of colonial borders and their significance in the daily life of Palestinians. As urgent narratives representing actual daily experiences, these blogs speak of a need for narratives that respond to ongoing experiences of subjugation. These are the accounts of women who cross the borders routinely and regularly, or who experience it for the first time due to confinement resulting from borders as actual physical spaces. As these women narrate their individual experiences of border crossing, they also highlight the subjective gendered voices that are largely muted by the representations of the border from a shared or collective perspective.

Chapter 7.   Permission to Digress: A Reading of Tamara Nasser's Blogs

At the heart of Tamara Nasser's blog lie two questions, "how do I write and how am I going to be read?" This thematic and critical thread (the concern with both representation and readership) arises and continues through her blogposts written between 2011 and 2016. Tamara's blog explores and embodies both the possibilities and the limits of writing from a position of multiple struggles, as she writes from the margin: as a woman, a Christian Palestinian, and as a member of the Palestinian minority in the state of Israel.[28] She pushes creatively against boundaries and dares to mock them. Therefore, her blog speaks directly to the question of this thesis: to the limits and the possibility of a feminist voice when a subject writes from a particularly politically sensitive location.

Tamara's blog exhibits the feminist voice of an aspiring writer; thus, the blog itself becomes a metaphor of her concern with writing and representation as a Palestinian woman who is also a citizen of the state of Israel, thus, presenting an example of how online writing can open creative ways of responding to and negotiating issues of women's representation in anticolonial struggles such as that of Palestine. By dramatizing her personal life, blurring the line between reality and fiction, and using a consistently satirical voice throughout her narratives, Tamara's blog offers creative reflections on various questions of gender by offering a narrative of embodied everyday and intimate experiences.

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[28] In speaking of Palestinians here, I am referring to Palestinian citizens of Israel. In Israel, "Jewish" and "Arabs" are not only considered ethnic tags, but also as 'nationalities' (Levy 2014). According to the 2012 survey *Israelis in the Digital Era*, Arabs are more active than Jews in blog writing (37% versus 10% respectively) and reading (58% versus 29%). The data indicate "how the internet fulfils Arab society's needs that are not otherwise met by traditional media platforms" (Abu-Kishk 2018, 101).

In Chapter Two, I discussed the importance of locating the category of gender alongside other significant categories of difference, including race, class and nation, to the lives and writing of third-world feminists, whose "location" results in multiple forms of oppression (Mohanty 1992). Thus, the feminist reading applied in the analysis of Tamara's online narratives takes "location" as a primary concern.

Tamara occupies a liminal place and status as a Palestinian woman and citizen of the state of Israel (Herzog 2004). Such location highlights key contradictions between the nation and the state, as Palestinian women find themselves entrapped between what constitutes the Palestinian and the Israeli, state and society, and Israeli law and Palestinian culture.[29] The patriarchal nature of the structures that dominate the lives of these women, "whether the family, the state, or the national/ethnic communities", has produced both powerful experiences of oppression as well as resistance and latitude (Sa'ar 2007, 45).[30] Palestinians in Israel are part of a national minority, defining themselves in relation to thecir Palestinian national identity, and they are, accordingly, "seen by Israelis as enemies" (Sa'ar 2007, 48). This "trapped minority" (Rabinowitz 2001), however, does not share the same collective fate as those Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories, for their entitlement to Israeli citizenship rights gives them a tangible advantage (Sa'ar 2007). Nonetheless, Palestinian women in Israel have to navigate multiple patriarchal regimes, which are informed by the many metanarratives of modernity, national identity, and cultural authenticity, amongst others (Klein 1997).

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[29] This sense of entrapment is most visible, for example, in cases of domestic violence against women and their having to resort to police for protection. Palestinians see the police as an essential tool of oppression. Thus, seeking police protection is regarded as taboo and women who do this are considered traitors; simultaneously, the police force, argues Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2004), meets these women with sexist and racist attitudes.

[30] On a grassroots level, over the past two decades, NGOs have been the prominent bodies by which feminist work for women's rights has been done on the ground. The two groups, Jafra and al-Fanar, established 1990 and 1991 respectively, started a wave of feminist NGOs that gave priority to women's issues albeit while remaining committed to the Palestinian national struggle (Sa'ar 2007, 52). There is a strong Palestinian NGO presence today in Israel dedicated to such feminist goals, including Women Against Violence, al-Siwar, and al-Badil, which are dedicated to fighting gendered and sexual violence; and, more recently, *Aswat*, Palestinian Gay Women (see Abdo 2002 and Baker 2002).

Through a focus on some of her most intimate personal experiences, Tamara opens up important political discussions about what it is like to write as a woman from such a location. Her feminist voice is at odds with social and national expectations, yet this vigorous voice is also conscious of the colonial orientalist gaze. By voicing these restrictions on her writing practice, she creates a space of possibility. In this space, she is always being, negotiating, and articulating her existence within this location at this specific time in history and speaking back to these multiple regimes whether that of the family, the state, or the ethno-national community, which relate to one another in complex and often competing ways.

But by maintaining a personal subjective voice throughout her blog, Tamara is not interested in recreating or representing the real, but in art's ability to transcend that reality and in writing as a form of art and imagination. Her life writing poses the question of how much further we can push the discourse around women's issues that is often deferred in Palestinian narratives because such discussions do not serve the cause and may risk undermining idealised images of Palestinian women as represented by nationalist narratives. Tamara's blogs thus weave together a world of her own, where the line between fiction and reality is blurred. She positions herself as both the narrator and the protagonist of her online life writing, thus, the "truth of the narrative" in this case, as Smith and Watson (2010, 16) explain, "becomes undecidable; it can be neither fully verified nor fully discredited." Therefore, as readers of this self-referential writing, we are required to "adjust our expectations of the truth told" (16).

As readers of Tamara's blogs, we are uncertain whether the events, as she narrates them, are real, an exaggeration of the real, or merely her imaginings. I read this canny and intentional fusion between reality and fiction as Tamara's way of challenging perspectives on the function of art in the Palestinian context and as pushing the limits of representation. Tamara does not provide simple answers in her blogs, but she invites reflections through creating different personal scenarios which offer alternative images of Palestinian women, of ways of being in

this space that are not usually talked about, represented, or taken seriously. Most of Tamara's blogs are thus preoccupied with issues of writing, reading and representation. Her posts address these questions through adopting a cynical voice, which tells stories, personal stories, intimate stories, so personal sometimes that they confront and unsettle readers. In these narratives, Tamara creates scenes and scenarios from her home, the street and the university, creating a world of her own. Tamara's online narratives, thus, as Smith and Watson suggest in relation to life writing, offer readers "the intimacy of the quotidian details of daily life, the intimacy of shared confession and self-revelation" (Smith and Watson 2014, 75). Her first blog "The First Word and the First Mould" (June 2011) reveals the intention behind starting her blog (See Appendix B: Figure 5). She writes:

Here

So that when

I grow up…

I become

A writer

The six-Arabic-word blog could have taken up less space if written as a simple sentence. Visually, the blog resembles lines of poetry which it is not. But these lines also claim space, focus on the I, on becoming, on temporality, and on narratives. The blog itself becomes a tool of both self-expression and experimentation. The narrative space she creates pushes the boundaries in relation to the ways in which political and feminist content can be negotiated in the blogosphere. In this way, Tamara determines what she wants to be and how she acts, without waiting for the dominant group to recognise her or her writing's legitimacy. Her narrative is a "tool for creating a critical consciousness, which is an indispensable condition for resisting oppression" (Baratz and Reingold 2014, 228).

Note on Translation

For the purposes of this chapter, I have translated excerpts of Tamara's blogposts, which were originally written in Arabic as are most of Tamara's narratives.

Writing in Arabic in Israel meets what is considered to be the "the first condition of minor literature: it is not a minor language literature, but the use of a major language by a minority" (Baratz and Reingold 2014, 229). Even though Arabic is one of Israel's two official languages, it is not spoken or read by most members of the majority Jewish population. Until recently, Arabic was still considered an official language in Israel along with Hebrew. In July 2018, Israel passed a new "Nation-State Law", which downgraded Arabic from an official language to a language that "has a special status in the state" (Haaretz July 2018). Therefore, Tamara's choice of Arabic as the language of blogging within this location speaks to a choice of 'being' within a space dominated by Hebrew as the official language. Both Arabic and Hebrew are extremely potent cultural and political symbols, in the context of Israel, as markers of identity and repositories of past and future visions. Language, as one of the most politically resonant symbols of collective identity, has also been used as a "marker of Otherness".[31] Levy (2014, 4) argues that:

> As Israel's two official languages, Hebrew and Arabic coexist uneasily within a rigid political and social hierarchy. Israel was created as a Jewish state and a Hebrew state; the revival of Hebrew was the heart of the nation-building project. Today, Hebrew is the public language of state and society, while Arabic is

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[31] In *Poetic Trespass* (2014), Levy argues that when a writer chooses to write in one language rather than another as a political statement, "the language the text inevitably doubles as a metatextual discussion about language … to write in one language means contending with the shadow of the other." Levy uses the example of the English – Spanish "borderland" poets who affirm that "no matter which language they write in, the 'other language' shines through producing, as it were, and effect of refraction." Despite the visible absence of Hebrew in Tamara's blog written mostly in Arabic, Tamara brings this absent language into her work through some creative thematic devices by weaving plots around the concepts of language, communication and miscommunication, or even the loss of language.

largely relegated to private use behind closed doors. Hebrew literature and culture are valued as spiritual and national assets, while Arabic, the language of the enemy, is viewed as a socially, politically, and culturally inferior tongue, valued mainly for its uses in the military and state security services.

As a native Arabic speaker, and a Palestinian who is familiar with the cultural and historical context of Tamara's narratives, I still found some of Tamara's writing challenging to translate. Her writing marks a significant cultural difference intensified by her location at the fringe of Hebrew and Arabic, dwelling in both languages, and sometime making linguistic and cultural references based on this liminal location. Therefore, I understand the partiality of such translations, and its limits. I also understand the role I play in selecting texts for translation and the subjective nature of my selection and translation. In fact, Sontag (2007) sees translation as the act of "making choices," whether these choices are linguistic, literary, or even ethical. She argues:

> The ethical understanding of the task of the translator originated in the awareness that translation is basically an impossible task, if what is meant is that the translator is able to take up the text of an author written in one language and deliver it, intact, without loss, into another language.

What also makes Tamara's blog challenging to translate is its predominantly humorous features. Tamara creates humorous effect through various techniques: using vernacular street humour, twisted endings and, most importantly, satire. But she also uses what Arthur Berger calls "rhetorical exuberance", a humour technique which "derives its power from its extravagance' (Berger 2017, 25).

Given that "every text is original since every translation is different and is, to a certain extent, an original creation, thus becoming a text in its own right" (Baratz and Reingold 2014, 229),

my translation of these selected narratives also involves my creation of a text based on my reading of Tamara's blog narratives.

Tamara's Blog

What is inviting about Tamara's blog is the space it opens onto her personal life, a space in which she creates a vision of her personal, familial, student and, later, professional life. Through setting her narrative within her familial surroundings, she explores her relationship with her mother, father, sister, grandmother, and grandfather: the familial structure. So, by the time readers have gone through her blogposts, the earliest of which is written in 2011, they get a glimpse of what Tamara's life looks like. Tamara creates a series of encounters with each member of her family to the effect that a reader can develop a liking or an antipathy for certain characters. The most important figure in her writing, other than herself, is her mother. Tamara's mother occupies a considerable space in her writing. She is portrayed as an ambiguous figure, who, despite her disapproval of Tamara's social behaviour and professional and life choices, is still a loving maternal figure. Her father's presence is almost overshadowed by the more authoritative presence of her mother; he is satirical but less critical. The encounter with Tamara's grandfather subverts glorified and sanctified images of the grandfathers as the emblems of the romanticised past, and instead highlights the generational differences between Tamara and her grandparents, and draws attention to her position within a different understanding of the temporal, spatial, and political context in which she lives. Her grandfather is not the source of all wisdom of her life, and his narrative of home is not the only homogenous vision of home that she accepts. As most of her blog entries are written as diaries of her life as a student of Film and Cinema at Tel Aviv University, we also see her in different settings, getting a glimpse of her political, social, and professional life: at her accommodation in Tel Aviv, at the campus, at her home in Acre through her visits to the family, and in the street.

Thus, Tamara moves from the private to the public, from the setting of the family to the state-sponsored university campus.

Tamara's comic representation of her experiences persists through most of the narration of these encounters, forming a unique stylistic technique. She often employs a tone distinct from standard Arabic rhetoric, utilising the vernacular and an ironic mode that is full of wit. Her delightful, light-hearted personal accounts open spaces that are usually regarded as taboo or impermissible. The blog becomes a site where the tragic merges with the comic and the ironic modes, underlying the most serious thematic involvement. Tamara's blog is also a literary and a creative attempt at challenging the legacy of sanctified forms of national narratives.

Readership and Representation: "My Mother and Postmodernism"

There are therefore many different levels of reading operating within Tamara's blog narrative, for example, how her mother reads Tamara's educational choices along other life choices and how society reads her in comparison to her mother. Other examples include her mother's constant concern over how they, as Palestinian Christians, are read within the larger socio-political context; her grandfather's literal and metaphorical reading of her text; and her Israeli colleague's reading of her expected filmic production as a student. Tamara consciously and intentionally plays on the idea of representation and readership as she weaves scenarios from her personal life while simultaneously ironising, exaggerating, or refusing such representation. In this way, she produces informed feminist writings, which digress from the mainstream but show understanding of the complexities of her subject position and location. Therefore, hers is a deliberate act of digression: one that is not detached or disengaged from but is rather grounded in reality; one that starts at home.

Tamara starts her blog "My mother and Postmodernism" (July 2011) by stating that, "I see in my mother raw material for writing" (see Appendix B: Figure 6). Both the first sentence and the title of the blog set the tone and the scope of most of Tamara's writing on her blog. Her

concern is with situating herself temporarily and spatially within both the real and the literary. In starting the blog by referring to her mother as the "raw material" inspiring the act of "writing", we as readers are bound to question whether the writing Tamara produces about her mother is a representation of the "real", or is, rather, fictive and inspired by her mother. The very few subtle references to writing that Tamara makes in her narratives play on the idea of art and reality, life writing and creating fiction inspired by figures such as her mother. Tamara's writing material, and her characters are thus grounded in and provoked by her reality; they are part and parcel of her life. Her mother is positioned as the primary reader in the narrative. Tamara's scenarios are loaded with her mother's perception of her, her social position and her social behaviour. Her mother is an important figure, inspiring what Tamara sees as valuable writing material, displaying both complexity and banality, and representing both the traditional and non-traditional aspects of her life. Tamara herself cannot determine what her mother represents in her life: whether the motherly figure, the refuge, the traditional, or the modern. Her mother enjoys great social standing; she is a well-respected woman, a doctor, an authoritative voice. She is keen on Tamara's education, but unfortunately, she does not see in Tamara's study of English and Cinema the major that would empower her position within society. According to Tamara's mother, such study is neither financially rewarding nor socially sanctioned. The continuous comparison between Tamara and her mother by everyone else and by Tamara speaks of how the latter sees in herself a different woman. Her mother, at some points, fulfils the duty and the image of the mother as the preserver of social, religious, and national codes and conduct. Thus, she reads Tamara accordingly, setting her against a set of social codes that the society sees as appropriate. Comparing herself to the figure of her mother, an example of what conventional society casts as ideal womanhood, Tamara highlights the tendency of society towards homogenising women's experiences. She is an example of a

"good" woman and a Christian Palestinian: a well-respected figure. By juxtaposing herself with her mother, Tamara is bound to fail in fulfilling this image. Tamara writes:

> I see in my mother a raw material for writing. I hug her waiting for a response- Will she be annoyed and say, "Do not be silly!"; will she push me away and ask, "what's wrong?" or maybe she would welcome my invitation for a hug and would add a kiss on my forehead, the latest of which is rare.

> I miss her sometimes while I am in Tel Aviv, her and nobody else. I reconsider my decision to spend the weekend at the student's accommodation. I hurry back to her, carrying along the burden of those oppressive systems, and my troubled soul which keeps resisting day after day. I hurry to her office, oblivious to the closed door which means she might be in the middle of treating a patient. I hardly knock on the door, I open and enter and she meets me with a beautiful smile. She is surprised and the treatment is interrupted. She stands from the chair and hugs me and says, "You said you were not coming home."

> *Oh Mother, I am on the verge of collapse. What is this place you brought me into? Why did not you provide me with defence mechanisms? I was much happier in your womb*. Instead, I say,"I missed you. I ran out of food and I need to do my laundry." She laughs forgetting that we are surrounded by people (Italics in original).

In this way, Tamara portrays her mother as a complex figure, who is at once good and bad, beloved yet terribly problematic. She conveys this ambivalence and uncertainty about her mother and what her mother means to her by starting the blog in an indecisive tone. This indecision persists, and is conveyed through, for example, dramatising two contradictory scenarios in which she meets with her mother. It is also conveyed through the conflicting tones,

which portray both feelings of the yearning for the maternal presence of her mother yet the fear of the threatening social obligations which such presence implies. This ambivalence is also clear as we readers know that Tamara's cold conversation with her mother in fact conceals the otherwise internal voice of a child in need of a mother figure. In this way, Tamara creates a sense of intimacy with the reader as well, who, at this point, is more informed about her relationship to her mother than Tamara's mother is herself.

Here, Tamara's use of the image of the "womb" is not a mere reproduction of some of the essentialist patriarchal metaphors of the hegemonic national narrative. Tamara's reference portrays the womb as a hiding place, a secure haven, a space to return to.

Although Tamara attempts to break this nationalist vision of the figure of the mother, her own mother still functions within the boundaries of her mission of birthing a woman into the nation. This mission of protecting the boundaries of the nation by preserving its customs and traditions comes at the cost of constant conflict with her daughter. Tamara writes:

> When the question which worries [my mother] and makes her a less interesting creature in my eyes approaches, "And, what does she study?" I leave the room. I imagine her answer. She would say in a disappointed tone which I completely know "English and Cinema." Silence would prevail as if in a funeral. Someone would say in condolence, "May God wash her with mercy!" My mother would probably accept the condolences with a "Thank you."

This funereal scene that Tamara imagines dramatises her mother's sense of Tamara's "social death," as a woman, a Palestinian, a Christian, and a minority in the state of Israel. Tamara's emphasis on her mother's perception of her education and her choice of education is of symbolic and substantive significance. Education has long been perceived as a way to ensure and protect women's futures not only as it helps advancing or promoting women's

independence but also as it provides them with improved chances in 'the marriage market'. But in Tamara's case, too, as a female member of a national minority, obtaining an education is also part of the nationalist mission of the minority, a tool of resistance against the Israeli state's policy of marginalisation. For women in such contexts of multiple hierarchies of oppression, acquiring social and an economic status is important to allow for some access to power. In this sense, Tamara's mother's dissatisfaction with her choice is out of worry about how she needs to be socially, economically, and politically empowered to be able to function within this space. The mother's worry is the result of her understanding of the complexities of 'being' within this space, but, as a result, she places Tamara in yet another cycle of immobility.

The fierce battle between the social and the personal, her mother and herself is further illustrated when Tamara moves her focus to a family gathering, a family celebration where she is expected to behave in a certain manner as well as dress in a certain way. Tamara's attempt at fitting in by wearing a dress to please her mother ends in failure. Tamara ridicules the act of displaying her feminine look in order to appeal to her mother and fit into the familial and social setting. Thus, she decides to exaggerate her look. In vernacular Arabic, Tamara writes, "I excessively applied the make up over my face; I daubed my face with it, I stained it; and then started attacking my feet; forcing them into a rocketed-heel shoes, trying to stand like a "Bambi", cynically asking my mother, "Pretty?"'

The blog ends with this failed attempt at fitting in, after she realises that she is being stared at by her mother, and probably by everyone else as she loses control by drinking too much. Tamara writes:

> My laughter is getting louder and louder and my words are getting dirtier. I feel
> a severe dizziness in my head. I remember I have not eaten anything today. It
> could be dangerous to drink all this alcohol, especially if in fast shots.

I saw my mother looking at me, staring at me in the hope that I would stop drinking, but I increase the shots and stare back. I try to stand up and I do not make it. I whisper in my brother's ear that I have a headache and that I feel dizzy, and I am about to … about to... And I vomit in my plate, once and twice, and my mother comes forward… She takes me to my aunt's home, and I sit down, and my mother sits next to me: "When I ask you to come home, you do not. When you do, you insult us. Are you happy now? Is this your modern?"

I run to the bathroom, I push myself into the toilet and vomit and vomit until I am in so much pain. I throw out all that is inside me, I vomit today and tomorrow. My mother runs behind me and she wipes my face and repeats, "modern Tamara…"

I struggle to raise my head and I open my eyes in desperation and say, "Mother, maybe I am rather postmodern."

Being the object of scrutiny, Tamara responds by indulging in drinking to excess. This early blog probably sets the tone for how Tamara presents herself to the reader: as an exaggerated form of a revolutionary self in defiance of boundaries imposed by her mother and her social milieu. This blog sets Tamara as a young rebellious voice, a young woman who does not fulfil the image of femininity as required by her social surroundings where she is perceived as a "tomboy".

The act of staring and staring back between herself and her mother is a manifestation of her battle against her mother, of resisting the inclination to behave properly. Tamara's drunkenness incites her mother to accuse her of being "modern Tamara". Tamara's Arabisation of the word "modern", where modern is commonly used in Arabic as a cynical, accusative term, alludes to her break away from tradition, as perceived by her mother. Modernity, in this sense, and

particularly as it relates to women, is often dismissed as a marker of 'Westernisation'. Therefore, modern is invoked as the polar opposite of "tradition." In this way, Tamara ends her narrative by playing on this tension of being at the crossroads of modernity and tradition, a discussion which reflects the experiences of many Palestinian women. This tension uncovers one of the most significant, long-held, lived and embodied challenges to women as they are situated between the nation's need to be both "modern" and conservative at the same time. Tamara's witty play on words "modern" and "postmodern" utilises her literary dictionary to refer to a term which her mother would not necessarily make sense of, a state of being outside of the frame where her mother wants to fit her, and which her mother does not yet recognise or acknowledge.

"My Daughter, Whose Daughter?"

Tamara's subtle depiction of women's positioning between modernity and tradition, as is the case in most nationalist narratives, continues in another blog entitled "My Daughter, Whose Daughter?" (March 2013), (see Appendix B: Figure 7). In this blog, Tamara creates a monologue, written in the voice of a mother addressing her daughter. The voice is volatile. It is sometimes emotive and sometimes didactic. The blog is filled with emotive language displaying a mother's longing for her absent daughter, who has not returned home from her university campus for five weeks. In a disappointed voice, the mother compares her own loving relationship with her mother to her daughter's cold relationship to her. She says, "You are not like me, are you my little darling?" The mother's voice recalls memories of her daughter's childhood innocence, reassuring herself that her daughter is still a virgin. Her motherly concern is immediately followed by the need to check whether her daughter still behaves according to the sexual restrictions expected of her. Thus, the mother becomes the image and the symbol of the border guard. She needs to make sure that her daughter is abiding by the nation's laws, by its traditions.

Why absent for five weeks? Your grandmother is hinting that you might have a boyfriend in Tel Aviv. But I told her you never mentioned one. We both know why I never ask you about these things. You know I am waiting for the minute you tell me I am in love, and that he loves you back. Goodness, he will be so lucky. Will he be a doctor? Or an accountant? Or a doctor? Maybe you need to lose a little weight, dear. And wear heels and eyeliner. Your face is as innocent as a child, and men prefer femininity and beauty.

Here, Tamara creates an image of a maternal lineage, giving voice to the mother and grandmother. In this sense, Tamara is somehow aware that women often represent patriarchal and national borders, and that women play a part in the assignment of gendered spaces and the preservation of traditional roles. Therefore, Tamara employs the voice of a mother, backed by the authority of the grandmother to suggest how these social and cultural codes are passed down from one generation to the other. By focusing on this maternal lineage, she invokes a gendered space, but within it, the daughter is required to abide by certain norms and restrictions to keep the cycle going, to carry on the role designated by her mother, grandmother, and the patriarchal society in general. By highlighting the theme of virginity, Tamara undermines the prescribed codes of honour in Arab cultures.[32]

By invoking this gendered feminine space in juxtaposition with the foreign space of the university, Tamara highlights the role the women play in setting the nation's cultural boundaries. This voice of a mother requires her daughter to return to the familial space, a space with certain cultural expectations. The university, situated in Tel Aviv, constitutes a hostile alien space, "not only because it is culturally strange, but also because it belongs to the Jewish

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[32] In most Arab countries, virginity refers to "the presence or absence of the hymen." Khayyat (1990) offers an ethnographic analysis of "virginity-based" honour and shame. One of the repeated and common clichés of this patriarchal concept of honour in Arab cultures says: "a hymen, 'a girl's honour', is like a match; it may be lit only one time."

nation in which the prevailing discourse is liable to exclude the Palestinian women within it" (Abu-Rabia-Queder and Weiner-Levy 2013, 96). The university thus becomes another foreign space, just like the Israeli space they are entrapped in that threatens Palestinian cultural values. Because women are the symbol and the medium through which the honour of society is preserved (Kanaaneh 2002) by making sure women's bodies and their sexuality are under control, the mother's longing for a reunion with the daughter could also be read as a demand that the latter return to her cultural dwelling. This local dwelling is perceived as a more capable of protecting her, and thus protecting familial honour. Rabia-Queder and Weiner-Levy (2013, 97) argue that:

> In the Israeli–Palestinian context, the State of Israel is forced on the Palestinians, rendering Israeli space—to which they did not move of their own free will—not only alien and threatening to Palestinian family and collective values, as reflected in women's bodies, but also a threat to the values of national identity that accompany the women's sense of having betrayed their culture—a feeling intensified by the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The narrator in Tamara's blog moves to anticipate the possibility of a groom who could be "a doctor, or an accountant, or a doctor". This repetition of the word doctor, thus, emphasises the importance the society attaches to social status. This marriage talk underlines the pressure to marry that women's families exert, which leaves women with the choice between residing in this maternal safe space or in the institution of marriage. This guarantees that women will return home, both physically and culturally. Marriage and marriage talk become "a family means for maintaining and regulating community control over individuals, particularly women" (Erdreich 2006, 496). Therefore, as with Palestinians across the border, the family serves simultaneously as a source of oppression and of support (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 1999). For while marriage

remains a cultural imperative for both genders, it is regarded as a rite of passage to adult femininity for women.

Tamara thus gives voice to some of the most deeply personal conversations about women in which control is extended over their sexuality through connecting it to notions of innocence, piety, and honour. In this sense, she opens up familiar conversations that strike readers as completely relevant yet barely tackled, and unspoken or largely unrepresented in a space where national concerns prevail.

"A Very Old Title"

In the blog "A Very Old Title" (February 2013), Tamara centres her narrative around the idea of readership and representation by offering a selection of her narratives for scrutiny by her grandfather (see Appendix B: Figure 8). She dramatises the question of readership by writing a scene between herself and her grandfather, whom she sets as a reader of her texts. Her grandfather represents an aged patriarchal authority figure with certain social expectations of womanhood, as well as narratives. Thus, he still adheres to upholding certain cultural and social practices and also reinforces his male authority over the women in the family, specifically Tamara. Tamara's voice continues to be cynical and the blog in which she narrates a conversation over tea between herself and her grandfather is replete with satire. Tamara's satiric tone is played out through exaggeration either of her actions or her grandfather's, blurring the line between reality and fiction. The reader is no longer sure whether these events took place in the manner described by Tamara, or whether they are overblown or even fabricated.

In this blog, Tamara creates a text within a text. In this sense, she highlights the way her writing is viewed and read by her grandfather. Yet, the blog in which she narrates the process of reading her text by her grandfather is itself is a text which also deals with the way she is also read by him as a woman. Thus, she foreshadows some of the ways in which the larger readership of her

online narratives might make sense of her texts. She is speaking back to a larger national readership that might not approve of her writing, her writing style, or what she writes about.

> My grandfather is looking at me as I gulp my cup of tea. He crosses his eyebrows and mutters with an ancient voice, "Is that how people drink tea?"

> I pretend that I am ashamed of myself. Since I was a child, he has generously offered me comments. Do not walk like that; "you will be a young woman soon." Do not eat like that, "you are a young lady." Do not laugh like that, "you are no longer young." He has not given up and is still trying despite his constant failure, for I still walk in the same manner I did when I first started walking.

Tamara sets herself against her grandfather from the very beginning. By doing so, she prepares the reader for the end of her blog where her grandfather too rejects her writing. But the grandfather is a figure who heads the hierarchy of the patriarchal family, a symbol of what is old and sacred. For that, she is the object of his regular comments about "her proper womanhood", where he insists she needs to fulfil the image of "a conservative composed young lady," insisting on her role as a "woman" who needs to abide by certain social rules in order to gain respect. Handing over her writing to her grandfather, Tamara waits in silence, both expecting a negative reading of her text, yet hoping that he might appreciate this new perspective. As she explains it:

> His eyes hurried from one line to the next; his face started changing colours, and his breathing became intermittent until he suddenly stopped reading. He threw me the paper, growling at my face, "Let me pass." He left his couch looking for his crutch and then headed to the shelves close by. He reached out for a book, and blew the dust covering it. He went back to the couch as slow as the years that passed over those books lying on the shelves. I was certain that it was the

holy book which contains the various works of Ghassan Kanafni and Mahmoud

Darwish and other Palestinian writers which he made me read years ago.

Tamara's writing thus intentionally sheds the light on the difficulty of writing oneself in a space where the value of women's writing is set against the literary prototypes of figures such as Ghassan Kanafani and Mahmoud Darwish. Tamara's "old title" is an invitation to embrace the new and to look beyond those works canonised in the Palestinian literary imagination, to open the gate for a more contemporary cultural production. Kanafani in particular is one of the most prominent resistance literature writers, while Darwish is acclaimed as Palestine's nationalist poet.[33] What Tamara's blog suggests is not a total rejection of these literary writers and their work, but rather a frustration with the limits such works have imposed on other more recent and emergent forms of writing that speak directly to her own lived and embodied experience of Palestine, and her own gendered experience. Choosing Kanafani and Darwish, two male writers, who, according to her grandfather, are pioneers of great Palestinian literature, signifies the marginality of women's writing and of women's voices within this literature.

Tamara does not reveal what kind of writing it was that she had handed to her grandfather to read. The only thing her grandfather reads aloud is her name, which is very significant to her authorial voice because it is the name she gives to her blog. Tamara writes:

> "Tamara", my grandfather reads. He always avoids calling my name. He does
>
> not like it. It is a hybrid name, almost meaningless. Besides, how does one
>
> pronounce it for Heaven's sake? Sometimes, he stresses the "T", so my name

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[33] Ghassan Kanafani, a Palestinian author and a political figure, coined the term "Resistance literature" which is "literature produced within an arena of struggle, by authors actively engaged in that struggle, who express their ideas and feelings about resistance and liberation through their texts." (Ball 2012, 79). Most Palestinian literature has been read in this sense as a cultural expression of resistance, which affirms collective political identity, and resists colonial domination (Harlow1987). Colonial domination itself was carried out also by producing and controlling discursive representation and Palestinian resistance literature identified that and worked to reclaim voices, as a form of literary resistance working together with the broader political struggle.

becomes Ṭamara, other times, he lifts the stress from the T sounds and completely drops it, and my name becomes "Mara".

Her grandfather's dislike of her 'hybrid' name, as well as his failure to accurately pronounce it, becomes symbolic of his failure to read her narratives. It is true that Tamara does not disclose what narratives she gave her grandfather, but readers can get a sense of her disruptive narratives of digression, which she intentionally creates as they read through her blog narrative, a narrative quite different to that of either Kanafani's or Darwish's. She thus complicates the notion of 'resistance narrative' by raising some unsettling questions about the relationship between gendered and nationalist agency and the writing subject.

Naomi

Despite producing a narrative which is largely focused on her own experiences, Tamara still raises important questions related to the representation of her place within the larger socio-political context. Through the previous examples, we have seen how Tamara narrates scenarios where she locates herself and her voice in an intimate family setting, her larger extended family and her community. By presenting those different readers of herself and her narratives, she sheds light on some of the expected gendered roles women are to play within this space. Tamara's awareness of such readership, though, does not mean that she awaits permission to digress from her socially assigned script. In a blogpost entitled "Salt without Sea" which Tamara wrote as a review of the Palestinian Film *Salt of the Sea*, she expands the circle of readership to include the way she is read within the state of Israel both as a Palestinian and as a woman. In this blog, Tamara voices some of her concerns on the issues of art, representation and reception, as they are magnified by her location. In particular, some of her worry comes from the underlying assumption that Palestinian creative practitioners in Israel have to represent their 'community' in positive ways. Tamara writes:

I am also worried about the fact that I am a female citizen of an Arab minority in the Jewish state. The dimensions and effects of being a cinema student are even more worrying. My reality imposes on me a responsibility of a distinct nature, of a political and social nature, whether I approve or not. I work on altering our marginalised image in the international cinema … But should this be my only concern and my greatest and first goal? Is it possible to go beyond the context and the reality of the Palestinian and create "the cinema for cinema's sake"? Is that even what I want? Can I create a satiric scene of the right of return? How would it be received? By our audience and by the majority? Do I really care about the Jewish majority? Who will watch me by the end of the day? I am paralysed by all of this.

Tamara, as a writer and a film student interested in cultural production, is aware of the complexities that surround the issue of writing from such a position, and of reception as a major concern. Who reads the work and how it is read are questions always on her mind.

Tamara dramatizes this crisis of representation and reception and her "assumed" resulting paralysis in a blog entitled "Falastinma" (see Appendix B: Figures 9-10). The title is almost meaningless in Arabic, a fusion of the two words "Palestine" and "cinema." In this blog, she raises the question of how she can reconcile the need to narrate her identity creatively, with the complexities of doing so in the face of a judgmental readership (or an audience in the case of film production). Tamara writes that "one of my best creative tactics as an Arts student was my attempts at avoiding 'Naomi.'" Naomi for her is the "Israeli state in flesh" and she is the Israeli readership, audience, gazer, objectifying eye, and the settler who, to use Tamara's words operates as "a statement that says: No my friend, I am the one staying here." Tamara writes:

I have learned to manipulate time when we are in the same class. I exit the class before it ends so that I am not forced to listen and answer all [Naomi's] questions which she herself describes as intrusive. Questions about "The Arab Israelis" as she likes to call them. I have always tried to correct her, saying "Palestinians, sister. Palestinians." She smiles, igniting my resentment and says, "It does not matter." "It does matter" I answer back in worry.

Don't you think that you now have to do your first exercise? Film something or the story of someone of your Arab society? Come on, give it to us. We are very excited about what you would offer the Israeli Cinema, with the fact that you are an Arab girl and so on… I think you can offer a lot. Show us the beauty of your culture, document the difficulties you pass through as a female in a patriarchal society, and even more, you can invent a plot or a scenario of the story of An Arab girl who falls in love with a Jew. All the associated themes will explode. Or you know what? Leave those peace bridging films. Who cares about peace. We want anger, disgust, a revolution. Count the dead, film the blood, curse the state. It will be wonderful. Anything you do. We will include you, because there is no price for such inclusion, my dear.

Palestinian women in the state of Israel are also entrapped in the metanarrative of the 'only democracy in the Middle East.' While their bodies, fertility and their motherhood is viewed as a demographic threat to the Jewish character of the state, Israel still persists with a narrative of 'democratic modernism' which is based on the respect of minority and civil rights. Therefore, women are the subject of the lie that 'Israeli democracy liberates women.' And despite their hybrid identity, their alterity is emphasised in the state's policies, as well as by the Jewish majority. Hybridity here, does not imply an erasure of power discrepancies. In fact, Palestinians

living in Israel as citizens enjoy fewer citizen rights and occupy a less social position than any member of the Jewish sector.

Tamara dramatises this sense of alterity in the eyes of the state of Israel through the feigned curiosity of Naomi, and her "intrusive" questions about 'Arab' Palestinians, thereby highlighting the way she is perceived as an exotic object of fascination as an "Arab female" for Naomi. Tamara sheds light on her marginalisation by taking the reader to one of her classes. A list of Hebrew full names of the class attendees is read, but only her Arabic last name "Nasser" is read. She is then singled out by Naomi, who declares: "You are alone. I mean you are the only *Arab* in the class." Tamara manages to simply yet subtly portray her alterity by only deleting her first name from a list of names. Tamara, a name with an origin in Hebrew, is thus dropped in order to highlight her Arab identity. This intentional deletion of her first name reminds readers of her grandfather's avoidance of her first name in the previous blog.

Tamara also uses Naomi's voice in an ironic reference to the state's narrative of democratic "inclusion". There is a long history of Israeli censorship, which deliberately put obstacles in the way of screening Palestinian movies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as filming and producing them, through denying permissions, the arrest, imprisonment and even expulsion of artists from Occupied Palestinian territories (Gertz and Khaliefeh 2008, 35). Naomi's conditional inclusion of Tamara's future film is based on conceding her 'national' belonging as Palestinian and producing her movies as an 'Arab' minority.

Through a long monologue in the voice of Naomi in which she describes the kind of movies that Israeli cinema would welcome from an 'Arab', Tamara's voice is silenced. Her verbal silence in this conversation is further emphasised as we learn by the end of the blog that she chose not to make a film about her Palestinian experience for a class on Israeli cinema.

Just as she tries to avoid Naomi, who opens up the question about her "Palestinianness", Tamara's overall narrative avoids articulating her identity through only identifying with her

national belonging. In this blog, however, Tamara uses her voice to assert her Palestinian identification, as a counter-narrative to the Israeli state policy of non-recognition. Her national identity becomes as marginalised, and as important, as her gendered voice.

Uncharted Territories and Improper Narratives

Whereas Tamara's narrative does not neglect the fact that she is a Palestinian minority in the state of Israel, her identification of herself does not start with nor revolve around her national belonging or identity. Her narrative begins with herself, her body, her sexuality, as part of her multiple struggles. Tamara's posts somehow strike the reader as not overtly political, but nonetheless daring, perhaps offensive, and even treasonous. But for Tamara, nothing is beyond the borders of satire. The text thus defies the boundaries that are culturally and socially prescribed.

In a blog titled "During my period, I become revolutionary" (January 2012), Tamara employs humour again to discuss issues of her body and sexuality (see Appendix B: Figure 11). She brings that which is not commonly written about into the centre of her text and gives another dimension to the word revolutionary in the space she occupies. She attempts to make sense of the way her body works, and the way her body image unfolds as she stares at herself in the mirror. The act of looking at herself and her body rather than being the object of the male gaze is in itself arguably revolutionary. She takes on the act of gazing at her body, she reads it, interprets it, attempts to understand it, and even questions and narrates it.

Tamara recounts a memory of childhood conversation with her mother as she started noticing the changes on her body. She writes:

> — "Mom, why are my boobs bigger than other girls?"
>
> — Don't say boobs, say breasts.
>
> — What's a breast?

—It's your boobs.

—Why?

— Because it is taboo.

The conversation with her mother about her body comes to mind as she accidentally overhears a couple of young men who describe a woman as "fat with a pretty face". She confronts those strangers with the question, "But Brother, are her boobs big too?" Tamara's confrontation with these two young strangers opens a conversation both on the way women bodies are the object of men's gaze and the way women's bodies are appropriated. She moves the discussion from what probably looked like a mother-daughter private conversation to the public space where even conversations about women's bodies are mostly dominated by men. She is thus sending an invitation to bring these questions to the public space and to the core. What does it mean to be born in this body in this space at this time?

Whereas some of the other bloggers I have discussed in this thesis write directly and explicitly about gender matters in Arabic by advocating for the rights of all women within this space, Tamara's blog does this through a narration of personal experience, narrating her own life, being born, and raised within this space. Rather than laughing in response to them, readers might find her texts make for uncomfortable reading. The effect of Tamara's very intimate insights into a woman's life is potentially more destabilising for readers, because their details help dissolve the distance that other bloggers might create through separating themselves from the experiences they record. Tamara's unusual focus on her own voice as a young woman, a peripheral figure, throws into relief her gendered identity, and her entrapment in the multiple patriarchal politics of the family, the nation, and the state.

Chapter 8.   Conclusion

8 January 2017

I sat in the Israeli waiting hall at Erez, holding on to my two-year-old son. A young female Israeli soldier had just asked me to sit there and wait. It was uncertain what I was waiting for. She said I had the permit to cross but my two-year-old did not. I sat contemplating the fact that I was a few kilometers away from Gaza, from home: from my family whom I have not seen for three years; from my mother. But there stood the possibility that I would be sent back to Australia, regardless. I waited in agony, trying to talk to the Israeli soldier who kept asking me to wait. I was left alone, thankful that Tamim was still too young to ask me questions. The hall was empty except for the heavily armed soldiers and the employees staring at their screens in the cubicles. Suddenly, a group of Palestinian women accompanied a man in a wheelchair through the gates from the Israeli side to cross back to Gaza. Judging by their luggage, I assumed they must have been returning from accompanying the man, a patient, to a hospital in the West Bank or Israel. As I sat there, feeling the utmost fragility, the women kept bringing in huge bulky black plastic bags as luggage and casually lifting them up to the inspection machine. The plastic bags kept coming in and I lost count of how many there were. I giggled as I looked at the reaction of the Israeli soldiers, who were confused, giggled themselves and were getting a bit uncomfortable. The soldier shouted in broken Arabic at one of the women to reveal what was inside these bags, as she ran the rifle across them. Some of the bags clearly contained clothes and quilt covers, and I assumed that they must

have brought back all that they had bought while having to live at the hospital. The woman answered in Arabic in a very strong loud voice, "You will see when you inspect them." She sounded fearless, and I felt ashamed of my helplessness as the women crossed to the other side. I stood and asked to speak to a senior officer, still petrified of what the response might be. The officer in charge said my son had "the right papers" to be allowed in; that female soldier had just never asked to see them.

This was my diary record of one of the many border-crossing experiences as a Palestinian woman, and for the first time as a mother. In November 2016 at a conference in New Zealand, I presented a paper on the ways Palestinian women bloggers cross colonial, nationalist and generic borders. Two months later, I had to cross borders with my then two-year old son back to Gaza, Palestine. My mother, whose cancer was made worse by the stifling siege on Gaza and the resulting deteriorating healthcare provisions, asked me to make the trip back. She wanted to bid us farewell. That particular encounter with the border in 2016 was a striking reminder that as a Palestinian researcher, I could not afford an outsider's perspective, because any research that I undertake on Palestine will always entail an emotional commitment.

Of course, the encounter with the border as I have recalled it, in part, in the abovementioned account is evidence of the cruelty and violence of the border as it relates to our everyday existence as Palestinians. However, the memory also speaks of the little acts of disruption to the otherwise predetermined performances and interactions at the border. This act of disruption unsettled, even if only for a fleeting moment, the power interplay between the armed soldiers and the women passengers. These women challenged the border through an extravagant display of their everyday luggage and belongings, creating, in effect, a comic scene which invoked the laughter of all those who witnessed it. As I recalled this incident of border crossing, I started to see how it could work as a metaphor for what the online narratives of Palestinian women that I

have explored in this thesis have in common. These narratives disrupt borders that are mapped by their colonial daily reality; they unsettle boundaries within the national space, and challenge the limits of national narrations. However, instead of focusing on the limits and the boundaries and on the forces of exclusion that restrict Palestinian women's life, bodies, and access to the public sphere and to narratives, I decided in the thesis to highlight the creative ways in which women use their voices to interject, access, and transform "the public sphere of expression" (Mohanty 1992), despite the multiple constraints they face.

The disruption of borders and boundaries might have been the clearest in narratives of border crossing discussed in Chapter Six; however, this disruption is also an overarching theme that characterises most of the blog narratives I have read and reflected on, albeit in different ways. In the blogs, the feminist voice is manifested in the ways the women's narratives unsettle and disrupt nationalist narratives and their homogenous, patriarchal versions of the nation. The blogs challenge the understanding of national narration as one displaying a shared language, shared vision of home, shared experience of exile, or even a shared history of colonialism. In this way, as Mohanty proposes, the women engage as situated subjects in the process of historically narrating the nation, articulating their own embodied experiences of being women and being Palestinian.

Some of the women chose to challenge the traditional accounts of the nation by positioning their gendered identity at the centre of their narratives. For example, through her poetic voice, Lina's texts directly and explicitly protest against her entrapment in symbolic national narrations. Of course, such protests have also been articulated by Palestinian feminist writers in other modes and via other platforms. Nevertheless, as nationalist narratives persist in relegating women to the symbolic realm, Lina's distinctive voice demands a revisiting of such representations. In her consideration of the ways in which feminism is embedded in everyday practices, Sara Ahmed (2017, 12) argues that "feminist ideas are what we come up with to make

sense of what persists. We have to persist in or by coming up with feminist ideas." Lina's persistence in revisiting traditional representations of women in her narrative leads her to explore alternative poetic and creative ways in which she can write her woman's voice and experience into nationalist narratives. Tamara's narrative also directly and deftly disrupts nationalist narratives by drawing extensively on her situated experience as a woman.

Of course, not all women bloggers choose to make central their gendered identity in their online narratives. In fact, the more I delved into Palestinian women's blogs, the more I was convinced that the nation was a dominant concern in all these narratives, and thus, the possibilities for reading a feminist voice were more subtle and sometimes elusive. But even when narratives were specifically concerned with narrating some of the most restrictive colonial experiences such as that of border crossing, both Rana and Lina choose to be critical of national borders as well. Thus, instead of examining Rana's blogs only as witness narratives concerning colonial border crossing, I interpret her narrative as simultaneously unfolding an internal critique of national boundaries.

The persistent contemporary reality of colonialism in Palestine makes prominent certain tropes of identity, home, and memory in nationalist narratives. But as Palestinian women attempt to narrate their daily realities and experiences, their narratives clash with these sanctified traditional concepts. In fact, these narratives become a means by which women can negotiate their diverse realities in relation to predetermined concepts of home and national identity. Ahmed's (2017, 14) insights are helpful here, as she explains that "by trying to describe something that is difficult, that resists being fully comprehended in the present, we generate … 'sweaty concepts'. Ahmed explains that "sweat is bodily; we might need to eliminate the effort of labor from the writing. Not eliminating the effort or labor becomes an academic aim because we have been taught to tidy our texts, not to reveal the struggle we have in getting somewhere."

In the same way, the women bloggers whose writerly labour this thesis has examined do not filter the "struggle" and the "labour" that is involved in explaining the complexities of trying to orient themselves to their world, or the different competing narratives that shapes their identities, roles, and even their own narratives. This is perhaps the most important feature of these narratives: the struggle is evident in almost all the blogs explored in the thesis. And the struggle manifests itself as an ambivalence or even a tension. In Lina's narrative, it is the conflict between articulating her gendered voice in relation to a predetermined construction of her identity as a woman by a Western and a nationalist readership and her national voice in times of crisis, where the story of the nation is a more urgent concern. Mariam struggles between her own reproduction of heroic images, and her critical understanding of the need to go beyond heroic representations. Rana's struggles to reconcile her experience of home with her grandmother's memories, while Nour struggles to match her father's map with her own encounter with the Palestinian landscape. Linah's border-crossing account confuses the pronouns "I", "you" and "we", and she escapes a tragic experience with humour. Tamara focalizes her personal voice, and contemplates ways to transcend conventional national narratives, yet asserts her Palestinianness before her Israeli colleagues. "Feminism", Ahmed (2017,14) concludes, "can be a strain." That strain is what characterises most of these narratives.

I do need to reiterate that my study does not aim to provide a broad survey of or generalisations about online narratives of Palestinian women bloggers. These narratives highlight the possibilities for women in the online space in order to explore, question, unsettle, or even record and bear witness to their everyday reality and experiences. The diversity of those narratives is evidence of the fact that there is no such thing as the 'one story of the nation'. There is a vast body of research on the question of gender as it relates to the Palestinian context. However, to my knowledge, this is the first in-depth qualitative study that focuses exclusively on Palestinian women's blogs specifically as online life writing, and that explores in detail the ways individual

women are writing their stories online, using these narratives as a source of cultural and literary analysis. My hope is that the thesis's concentration on a small number of bloggers and their texts is able to do what large, often quantitative, surveys cannot: offer a rich sense of the ambivalence, the fluidity, and the tension that characterise women bloggers' narratives.[34]

Future Pathways

Language and Reception

This work lays out paths for future research. One such pathway would be to study the relationship between writers' articulation of gendered voices and the language in which they write their blogs. The connection between language and reception is an important 'postcolonial' concern in the study of texts from third-world contexts, especially those that are transmitted through difference, that is, through the globalised space of the internet. Therefore, a comparative study of the gendered voice as it is inflected in Arabic and English blogs would make for fascinating and important research. Both Lina's and Tamara's narratives, written in English and Arabic respectively, speak of such a concern with readership.

Archiving

The question of internet archiving is also an important one for the preservation of the bloggers' narratives for the historical record. The issue of archiving and the loss of archives became more pressing towards the end of my study, as I started noticing that more women are making their blogs private. Two of the bloggers I explored in this thesis, Rana and Tamara, have taken their blogs offline in the past year. I can only speculate on why they have done so. This could relate to Ahmed's notion of "sweaty concepts" mentioned above. Most of these bloggers are young women; their writing unfolds their struggles with questions of identity, and their constant

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[34] Victoria Biggs (2017) explains that "quantitative and some qualitative methodologies struggle to capture the fluidity and ambiguity in thought, with the result that survey and poll data is often crude and two-dimensional."

negotiation of their daily experiences and their multiple belongings. Therefore, some bloggers might feel uncomfortable sharing their earlier narratives, or might think the writing is not representative of how they perceive themselves now. Alternatively, the decision to remove blog posts could also relate to copyright issues, especially for women who aspire to pursue a career in writing. Censorship and the fear of being persecuted, especially with the recent introduction of legislation restricting what it is possible to say online, and the crackdown on online activists, as outlined in Chapter Two, could be another reason. Therefore, different empirical methodologies could be employed to investigate the reasons why women decide to start or end their personal online blog.

In conclusion, studies on questions of gender and the nation in different contexts, including the Palestinian, are not new. In fact, as this thesis has noted, many postcolonial studies have recently engaged in analysing Palestinian literary and cultural productions. But a study of emerging narratives of Palestinian women who utilise online platforms for self-representation invites scholars from postcolonial theory and feminist theory to engage directly with narratives of the periphery, narratives in everyday experience. It also draws our attention back to some of the basic tenets constituting postcolonial theory, including resistance and representation. This return and repetition is important when it comes to Palestine, for "there is an ongoing need to maintain certain positions, go over the same ground, fight the same battles, simply because the overall determining context has not changed" (Williams 2016, 96). Blogs as forms of online life writing – contemporary narratives that are daily produced within such a context – draw attention again to questions of ordinary people's resistance to colonial subjugation and discourse. Through dynamic modes of self-representation and of reimagining the nation, the blogs invite us to reconsider and reinterpret narratives of the margin.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A   Rana's Blogs

Palestine, my grandfather's figs and olive groves.

This article was also published on *The Electronic Intifada* and *The Great Book Robbery* which I highly recommend you to visit.

Gaza – A church and a mosque that have shared a wall for hundreds of years. Photo Credit: Ruqaya Izzidien

We Palestinians have nothing to cherish more than our roots and ancestral identity. To us, olive trees and the shade in which our grandparents rested or lovers used to secretly meet weave together sweet pre-dispossession memories.

My grandmother's depleted voice can't but play and replay the same ecstatic melodies of a womanhood (before 1967) spent between Gaza and Jerusalem, or actually, between Gaza and an Israeli officer and from there to Jerusalem. She would repeat to me again and again how smoothly (compared to now) she and her Jerusalemite relatives could visit each other. According to her, the most difficult part was to find a carriage.

I would nod my head, sip my tea, and contemplate her face. It is

Figure 2 Palestine, My grandfather's figs and Olive Groves

My Jerusalem Diaries

May 26, 2011

Also published on The Electronic Intifada and The Palestine Chronicle.

What a pity being asked if you have ever been to your capital and all that you utter is a mere "I would love to go there one day" or that the last time you had been to it was when you were only nine. There could be a third way to answer this embarrassing question: yes you have passed by it but they didn't let you put a step out of the bus because you did not have a special permit that allows you to do so. I wonder which answer I should opt for as all of them, luckily, apply to me.

Have I listed all possible answers, I feel compelled to make you stop at every station and ponder the view as I roam the streets of Jerusalem with my parents, my grandmother and my sister in 2000. Later on, you will ponder me, a sample of a typical Palestinian, as I cross Bait-Hanoun border or "Erez Crossing" as being called nowadays by the Israelis.

The first picture my mind summons for Jerusalem, was 11 years ago when I went there for the first time. It is the picture of myself staring at a crowd Rabbis through the window of the bus that carried us to Jerusalem. They all were the same: dressed in black outfits and black hats with straggling beards and two curls dangling from their whiskers. I asked my mother who these were. Her answer was that they were "religious Jews".

Twitter Updates

» I fantasised the whole day over ma3mool, Holland & Barret dried fruit, & chocolate rolls. Now that I had iftar, I cannot even look at them. 1 year ago

» .@easyJet is the worst. Will be my last resort rather than first next time. 1 year ago

» In a direct infringement on a democratic vote of 73% to boycott Israel, .@ValerieAmos invited apartheid apologist @AmbMarkRegev to SOAS. 1 year ago

» @SOAS has become a disappointment, breaking the will of over 70% of its constituency to boycott Israeli apartheid by

Figure 3 My Jerusalem Diaries

When memory and reality meet: on my identity

Published on the *Electronic Intifada*

Two passports of two Palestinians: one from Gaza and another from the 1948 ethnically cleansed territories.

When everyone complained about our Palestinian Authority-issued passports many years ago for, humiliatingly, they would say, not bearing "Palestine" on their covers instead of the words "Palestinian Authority," I used to think of it as so trivial a matter as arguing on the best way to cut potatoes.

In the years that followed, however, I became increasingly aware that whether or not papers and documents define who we are, these labels and designations pose an array of questions that are, I think, personal, political and philosophical.

At the same time, I have grown exceedingly intolerant of the

Figure 4 When Memory and Reality Meet

Appendix B   Tamara's Blogs

Figure 5 The First Word and the First Mould

السبت، 9 يوليو 2011

امي وما بعد الحداثة

أرى في أمي مادة خامًا للكتابة. أضمها إلي وأنتظر تجاوبا ما- هل تنزعج وتقول: "شو هالزناجة" أم تبعدني وتسأل "شو في؟" أو ربما ترحب الآن في دعوتي للعناق وتضيف قبلة على جبيني، والحالة الأخيرة نادرة.

أتوق إليها أحيانا وأنا في تل أبيب، أشتاق إليها هي، لا أحد غيرها، أعيد النظر في قراري بأن أقضي نهاية الأسبوع في مساكن الطلبة، أعود مسرعة إليها، محمّلة بعبء الأنظمة التي تستبدّ بنا، بروحي المثقلة التي تقاوم يوما بيوم. أسرع إلى مكتبها، لا أكترث للباب المغلق الذي يشير إلى أنها وسط العلاج، بالكاد أطرقه، أفتحه وأدخل فتعلو وجهها ابتسامتها الجميلة، تتفاجأ وتقطع العلاج، تقوم عن كرسيها تحضنني وتقول:" قلتي مش مرّوحة؟"..

يا أمي أنا على وشك الانهيار، ما هذا المكان الذي أحضرتني إليه؟ لماذا لم ترّوديني باليات دفاعية أصدّ بها الحثالة البشرية؟ لقد كنت أسعد في رحمك. لكني أكتفي بالقول: "اشتقتلك وبطّل في أكل، والاواعي بدها غسيل".. تضحك وتذكر معا أنا محاطتين بأشخاص، تستدير وتعرّفني أمامهم: "هاي بنتي الكبيرة، بتتعلم بالجامعة، صارلي كتير مش شايفيتها". وتنظر أمي إليّ كي أوكّد صحة كلامها؛ نعم، أنا انتها وفعلا أتعلم بجامعة، ثم يأتي السؤال، السؤال الذي يؤرقها والذي يجعل منها مخلوقا أقل شعبية بنظري: "أه وشو بتتعلّم؟" أغادر الغرفة ولا أسمع جوابها، ستقول بنبرتها الخائنة والتي أعرفها تمام المعرفة: "انجليزي وسينما" ليخيّم الصمت على الحاضرين كالعزاء، فيكاد يقول أحدهم "الله يرحمها"، وتكاد أمي ترّد: "تعيشوا". لم أرغب في مشاهدة هذه المسرحية اليوم، ولن أستقبل الموضوع بمجسّات الحس العكاهي كعادتي، اليوم أنا في منتهى الحساسية ولا أتحمل منها هذا.

تنهي أمي العلاج، أراهم يتبادلون الحديث، تتقدم مني امرأة كانت قبل قليل في الغرفة "ولك بتروح عل جامعة زي امّك؟" أجاوب كطفل تُعرض عليه تفاحة بدل شوكولاطة "بدّيش". لم أعلل ولم أتحدث كالكبار، فقط "بدّيش".

قلت بتروح عل منفشك، ليه بتتعلميش زي امّك
وتصير تلبس، بس عبس، لا تعليم لا
لبس لا شجار

تحدثني أمي عن الأحداث الأخيرة ونحن في طريقنا إلى البيت. هذا كذا وذلك كذا، هذا أنهي شهادته الأولى وهذه ستبدأ مشوارها في تعليم الطب.. وكأنها تتذكر أنني أيضا بدأت مشواري في تعلم الأدب والسينما تسألني كيف أشعر وكيف التعليم، أحدثها عن التيارات الموجودة في الأدب وعن الفيلم "عطش" وكيف شعرت عندما عرضوه في القاعة الكبيرة "فاستلخت" وكيف انه الفيلم الوحيد بين جميع الأفلام المعروضة الذي يتحدث عنا-العرب في إسرائيل وأنه يعرضنا مرة أخرى بطريقة سلبية، وأنه من المثير للاهتمام كون مخرج الفيلم فلسطينيا.. "المهم تدرسي منيح وتربطي بالامتحانات، شو بدّك تلبسي الليلة؟"

-"الليلة؟"

-"تعليلة ابن عمتك! لا أذكر أنها قالت شيئا عن أية تعليلة..

-"شو بدي أليس يعني، بنطلون وبلوزة".. تحول وجهها إلى ما بعد الشارع ما يشغلها: "بالله!ا"، ويبدأ مونولوجها: "ولك وينتا رح تصيري تلبسي زي بنات العالم صار بدك تصيري 21 سنة.. قلت بتروح عل جامعة وتشوف البنات وتصير تلبس، بس عبس، لا تعليم لا لبس لا شجار".. أصمت وأغمض عيني وأعاتب نفسي: هل فعلا كنت مشتاقة؟

"أتليخ" وجهي في المكياج، الطخه تدنيسا وأشن هجوما على قدمَيّ، أزجهما زجا في كندرة ذات كعب صاروخي، وأحاول الوقوف مثل الغزال "بامبي"، وعندما نجحتُ ناديت أمي ساخرة: "حلو؟"

قالت بجدية: "بيجنن..."

وصلنا إلى التعليلة، حاولت أن أسلم على جميع أقربائي، فهم كُثر، لدرجة أنه يطيب لي أحيانا عدّهم، حين أدخل إلى المراحيض أقدم على فعلتي (للتسلية). بعدما نجحت أو لم أنجح في مصافحتهم جميعا، ألصقت مؤخرتي في الكرسي وجلست قرب ابنة عمتي التي تكبرني بعشر سنوات. كانت المائدة تمتلئ بالأكل والكحول، بدأت أكل وأشرب، وأشرب وأشرب....

يعلو صوت ضحكي، ويحمر وجهي، وتتسخ ألفاظي.. أشعر بدوار حاد في رأسي، أتذكر أنني لم أكل شيئا خلال النهار وقد يكون من الخطير شرب هذه الكمية من الكحول، خاصة بجرعات سريعة..

رأيت أمي تنظر إلي، تحدق بي علني أتوقف عن الشرب، لكنني أريد من الجرعات وأحدق بها بالمقابل. أحاول الوقوف ولا أنجح، أهمس في أذن أخي بأن رأسي تؤلمني وأشعر بدوار وأكاد.. أكاد.. وأتقيا في الصحن، مرة ومرتين، وتأتي أمي، وتهمس لي ابن عمتي "حبيبتي، أسا بتمسكي فيّ وبتقومي شوي شوي".. وأقوم مرة أخرى مثل بامبي.. وندخل بيت عمتي، أجلس، تبقى أمي إلى جانبي: "جاي جاي بتيجيش.. اجيتي تبهدلينا؟ مكيّفة اسا يا موديرن؟ هذا هو المودرن؟"

أركض إلى الحمام، أقذف بنفسي إلى المرحاض وأتقيا، أتقيا حتى الألم، أتقيا كل ما في داخلي، أتقيا يومي هذا ويوم غد. تركض أمي مسرعة خلفي، تمسح لي وجهي وتكرر قولها: "مودرن تمارا..."

أرفع رأسي بصعوبة وأفتح عيني المغمضة بيأس وأقول لها: "ماما، بس يمكن أنا يوست مودرن..."

/http://www.qadita.net/2011/07/10/28701

Posted by تمارا at 2:49 م

Figure 6 My Mother and Postmodernism
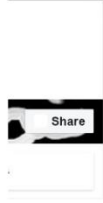
إبنتي, ابنة مَن؟

لا تترددي, عانقيني. أهو اليوم الاربعين على غيابك حبيبتي؟ لا افهم كيف تصمدين كل هذه المدة هناك, انا لم اكن مثلك يا غاليتي. لم تكن الهواتف متوفرة مثلما هي اليوم, كانت تسألني جدّتك في مكالمة سريعة اذا انوي العودة في نهاية الأسبوع, وكنت ابكي لها اني بحاجة إلى البيت لكن الرجوع هذا الاسبوع غير وارد في الحسبان, فتُغلق الخط كأني لا استحق سماع المزيد من صوتها. يأتي يوم الخميس فتنقبض شراييني ويتصبب قلبي عرقا, استنجد صارخة راكضة الى القطار الاخير فتتلقفني العائلة من ذراعي بحب ورجلي بحب وحنان. انت لست مثلي, أليس كذلك يا صغيرتي؟

لا تترددي, قبّليني. أهو شهر الامتحانات ما يحجبك عنّي؟ لا شكّ انك تُجهدين نفسك الان, اليس كذلك؟ انا لم اكن مثلك يا حبيبتي. هل يرفق بك صداع المجرية؟ اتذكرين كيف كنت تصرخين الما وتأتين الي فأضمك بعد ان اناولك الدواء. أثم من يعتني بك الان؟ وعلى فكرةٍ, هل انتظمت دورتك الشهرية؟ اذكر انك توقفتي عن اخذ حبوب للهرمونات قبل مغادرتك إلى تل ابيب, لكني لا اذكر اني علّمتك كيف تضعين فوطة "الاولوايز", كنتُ محرجة جدا ولم استطع النظر في وجهك, لم اصدق حينها كيف يمكن لجسمك البلوغ في جيل الحادية عشر, كم كنتِ صغيرة يا حبيبتي. أمل انك تجيدين استعمال "الاولوايز" اليوم, ولم تعصي كلمتي بعدم استعمال فوطة "التامبون", لا اظن انك تعصين اوامري, اعرف انك لن تفرّطي في عذريتك, اليس كذلك؟

خمسة اسابيع تغييبين؟ جدّتك ترمز لي دائما انه لديك حبيب في تل ابيب, ولكني قلتُ لها انك لم تأت بذِكر اي حبيب. كلتانا نعرف لماذا لا اسألك عن هذه الامور, فأنتِ تعرفين انني انتظر ساعة تقولين لي انك مُغرمة,وانه يبادلك الحُب نفسه. يا الهي, كم سيكون سعيد الحظ, اليس كذلك؟ هل سيكون طبيبا؟ ام طبيبة؟ ام محاسبا؟ ربّما سوف تحتاجين ان تخسري القليل من وزنك فتحظين على شاب مسيحي وسيم, طيّب القلب مع دخل محترم. اخسري القليل فقط يا حبيبتي, واركبي الكعب الرفيع ثم لَطّخي عينيك بالكحل, لان وجهك تقاسيمه اقرب إلى الطفولة والنغاشة, والرجال تفضّل الانوثة والجمال.

اقتربي, لا تزعلي, لا تكثرثي, خمسة اسابيع؟ ماذا تريدين؟ يا صغيرتي, انتِ لستِ مثلي, فابنة من اذاً تكونين؟

Figure 7 My Daughter, Whose Daughter?

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مدونة تمارا

عنوان قديم جدا: انا وجدّي!

لا اعرف كيف يرتشفون الشاي والقهوة بلباقة وتقوتني دائما الوتيرة المتعارف عليها عالميا او محليا. امدّ لساني ببطئ لكي استشعر, اتأكد ان السائل لن يلسعني ثمّ انكب عليه دون تحفظ واعتبار. يخيّل الي ان ارتشاف الشاي ببطء القرون السابقة ما هو الا عدم اخلاص لسرعة عصرنا الخاطفة- لا يحبون اليوم مثلما احبوا في السابق ولا يشاهدون فيلم لمدة ثلاثة ساعات وهنيها مثلما فعلوا في السابق ولا يقرأون بجلادة كما قرأوا في السابق. نحن في زمن السرعة ومن لا يواكب سوف يفوته القطار. اقول هذا لنفسي مغازلة وافرّغ اخر قطرة شاي في حلقي. فالتقاعس البشري امام كوب الشاي في القرن الواحد والعشرين يزيد من وجه الانسان الملوّن نفاقا فيضطر خوض سباقاته اليومية الاخرى مثقلا مهموما.

ينظر الي جدّي وانا منهمكة هكذا في كوب الشاي. يعقد حاجبيه ويطلق صوتا قديما آتيا من العصور الغابرة:

- هيك بشربوا شاي البني ادمين؟

اتظاهر بالخجل من نفسي.. فمنذ نعومة اظافري وهو يكرمني بالملاحظات. لا تمشي هكذا "راح تصيري صبية". لا تأكلي هكذا "صرتي صبية". لا تضحكي هكذا "بطّلتي صبية", وما زال يحاول رغم فشل مساعيه في الماضي- فانا ما زلت اخطو بنفس روح محاولات المشي الاولى. وما زلت اكل كما رهطت اللقمة عندما سلّمتني امي المعلقة لأول مرة. وما زلت اضحك بقوة وصخب بكاني الاول لأضحّك كل من حولي.

- كيف التعليم سيدي؟

- ماشي. يعني. ابصر.. اسا فترة امتحانات وكتابة وظائف وانا بكره اكتب وظائف بالعبراني.. بكره العبراني.. هيك بتعرف سيدي كيف الواحد بس لما يفوّت اوّل محاضرتين ثلاثة وبصير يقول خلص ما أنا راحت علي 3 محاضرات لايش اروح اسا؟ وسيدي بتعدش تروح عل محاضرات وبخلص الكورس والسمستر وبيجي وقت الوظيفة النهائية بموضوع بتعرفش فيه ولا اشي وبالعبراني كمان اقطع.. سيدي؟

لم يز عجني عدم اهتمام جدّي بقدر ما ازعجتني اجابتي له, لماذا لا يمكنني الاجابة ب "والله الحمدلله" او "نشكر الله"؟ ماذا جرى لعصر السرعة؟ ان ارتشافه البطيء والصبور للشاي لا يعني ان باستطاعته الاستماع إلى اجابتي المفصّلة, والتفاصيل قد تقذفنا خارج العلاقة الرسمية, ولا خير في هذا طبعا بين جدّ وحفيدته. ولكي استعيد اهتمامه, تذكرت انني احضرت نصا من نصوصي مطبوعا لكي اريه ماذا تكتب حفيدته. اعرف مقدار انز عاجه من اللابتوب فهو يذكره بسنه المتقدم. جدّي يحب القراءة والكتب وامّي ترجوني منذ فترة ان اذهب اليه واريه النصوص واخذ برأيه, وها انا انا هنا الان.

- امّي قالتلي أورجيك شو بكتب..

- اه صحيح. بتكتبي سيدي؟

- الحمدالله, نشكرالله..

- هاتي تنشوف..

ناولته النص بقلق وتردد. فاخذه بارتباك. كيف يمكن لاصابع خشنة ان تمسك ورقة دقيقة رفيعة؟ طلب ان اناوله نظاراته. تصفّت قليلا بها, لم ار زجاجة بمثل هذه السماكة من قبل. لن اسمح لنظارتي ان تصل هذه التخانة ابدا, انا بعكسه على كل حال- انز عها عنّي عند القراءة.

صببت المزيد من الشاي في فنجاني. وجلست صامتة في ترقّب.

"تمارا" قرأ جدّي اسمي مبتسما. يتحاشى دوما ترديده. فهو لا يستلطفه, اسم هجين, عديم المعنى تقريبا. وعدا عن ذلك, كيف يُلفظ بحق السماء؟ يشدد تارة على التاء ويصبح اسمي "طمارا" ويقوم تارة اخرى بتخفيف التاء حتى انعدامها فيصير اسمي "مارا".

اخذت عيناه تسرع من سطر الى اخر وروجهه يحوّل ويغيّر من لون الى اخر, وانفاسه تتقطع وتأففه يكبر الى ان توقف فجأة عن القراءة ورمى لي الورقة وزمجر في وجهي "جيّد لغاد" وقام عن الكنبة يبحث عن عكّازه ثم ذهب الى الرفوف المجاورة, تناول كتابا, نفث الغبار عنه, رجع إلى الكنبة ببطئ الاعوام التي مرّت على تلك الكتب المستلقية. كنت متأكدة انه ذلك الكتاب المقدس الذي يضم اعمال متنوعة لغسان كنفاني ومحمود درويش وكتاب فلسطينيين اخرين الذي اجبرني على قراءته قبل اعوام, وضعه على الطاولة قائلا:

- خذي اقريه هاد سيدي

مترددة ومنز عجة حاولت تمالك اعصابي والتفكير برد يليق "بصبية متزنة متزمة", لكن ارتجفت يدي قليلا ووقع منّي كوب الشاي متناثرا على جدّي والكتاب, مبللا قصصه وقصائده.

Figure 8 A Very Old Title

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مدونة تمارا

فلسطينما

من اكثر التحركات الابداعية التي قمت بها في كلية الفنون هذه هي محاولات تجنب "نعومي", هذه الفتاة التي اكره, اكرهها كما لو كانت الدولة الاسرائيلية بلحمها. تنحدر عينها اليمنى من السلالة اليَمَنية, وتلك اليسرى لا تُضبط, مثل مؤشر البوصلة المعطلة. فرقعت من الخواء مع بؤبؤ انفلتت اوصاله. نعومي سمراء, سمرتها مثل سمرة الخريطة القديمة, وجثتها كبيرة كرسالة شخصية استفزازية تقول: "لا يا صديقة, انا التي هنا باقية".

**

كالأرنب اقفز من حصة إلى اخرى. اتأكد من عدم وجودها في مقهى مبنى الفنون هذا, مبنى قبيح لا يختلف بشيء عن المباني الاخرى في الجامعة عدا عن الاشخاص التي تعلقهم ملابسهم وحليهم وحلقاتهم المتعددة زينة على حيطانه. نعومي ليست في مجال الرؤية, حوّل.

فأشرب النسكافيه بسلام.

**

تعلّمتُ التحايل على الوقت عندما نكون انا وهي في الدرس ذاته, اخرج من الحصة قبل انتهائها لكي لا ارغم على الاستماع اليها والاجابة عن اسئلتها التي تصفها هي بالحشرية عن "الاسرائيليين العرب" كما تحب تسميتهم, ولطالما حاولت تصحيحها بالقول "فلسطينيين خِبثا, فلسطينيين" تبتسم ابتسامتها الخبيثة التي تشعل ضغينتي وتقول "لا يهم", "بل يهم" ارد عليها بتوتر, فتقطعني بتناول هاتفها لتنكتك رسالة نصية- حركة افهمها اليوم بأثر رجعي على انها انتصار صغير. لها.

**

-الون ساعر؟

-هنا

-إدي ليفي؟

-هنا

-نعومي شمعون؟

-هنا

-ناصر؟

-هنا

يبدو انك وحيدة, اقصد, العربية الوحيدة في الصف. هَمَست بأذني نعومي وهي تقرط شيئا ما فتصطك اسنانها ببعضها.

**

الا تظنين انه يتوجب عليك الان ان تقومي, في تمرينك الاول, بتصوير شيء او قصة احدهم من مجتمعكم العربي؟ هيّا أعطينا. نحن متحمسون لما ستقدمينه للسينما الاسرائلية, كونك انثى عربية والخ.. اظن انه يُمكنك تقديم الكثير, ارينا جمال حضارتكم, وثِقي الصعوبات التي تمرين بها كأنثى في مجتمع ذكوري. بل واكثر من هذا, يمكنك خبك سيناريوهاً يتناول قصة عربية تقع في حُب يهودي, فجميع الثيمات المرافقة ستنفجر من تلقاء نفسها. او اتعرفين؟ دعك من افلام جسور السلام هذه, بلا سلام بلا بطيخ. نريد غضبا نقمة, ثورة. عددي الموتى, صوّري الدم, اشتمي الدولة. سيكون رائعا كل ما ستفعلين, سنحتويكي بأي ثمن, سوف نحتويكي لأن لا ثمن هناك

Figure 9 Falastinma (page 1)

للاحتواء يا عزيزة.

**

-كيف التعليم؟

-ماشي

-انا مش فاهمة عنك ماما, قاتلتينا انا وابوكي عشان تتعلمي هاد الموضوع.

-اه

-وكيف بتجيبي 60 بكورس؟

-معرضتش الفيلم اللي عملته بالصف

- ليش؟

**

جلست نعومي في المقاعد الامامية تحاول ضبط بؤبؤها الزائغ, تبتسم بخبث وتكزعلى اسنانها, تغرسها في لحمي المتبقي. لحمي المبعثر على الشاشة الكبيرة الذي لن يصفّق له احد.

Figure 10 Falastinma (Page 2)

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مـدونـة تمـارا

عند العادة الشهرية, اصبحتُ ثوريّة!

عند وصول العادة الشهرية, لحاول الصمود قدر الامكان داخل التيار العقلاني الانساني المطروح على جدول البشرية المعاصر. لكن احيانا، تلتقي هرموناتي مع الانسانية. عندها، اكون من اكون خلال ايام العادة.

النظر الى نفسي في المرآة صدري يؤلمني, صدري اكبر هذه الايام لا بد اني ازددت في الوزن, طبعا ازددت في الوزن- اختص في الاكل قبل اسبوع من العادة (بهمش بدها تيجيني), واختص في الاكل خلال الاسبوع (بهمش جايبتني), واختص اكلا وشربا بعد الاسبوع (لانه بطلت جايبتني). نعم. ام صدري.

امام المرآة اتذكر كيف كنت اخجل من صدري في طفولتي, في الصف السادس تحديدا- عندما بدا كل شيء ينمو ويكبر من الاسفل إلى الاعلى. هكذا كانت تتضجان حينا البطيخ دون ادراكي وانا جالسة امام التلفاز اشاهد بحماس وتقدير اجسام اشخاص اخرين.

كانت تظهر على الشاشات مراهقات اجنبيات تتمنى صدرا ممثلنا كبيرا. اقول لنفسي انظري, هذه لا تخجل, لماذا تخجلين انت؟ اسحب اللحاف من ورائي واتجه نحو امي, اخرج اصبعي من فمي متسائلة:

-ماما ليش بزازي اكبر من باقي البنات؟

- قولي صدري!

-شو يعني صدري؟

-يعني بزازك

-ليش؟

-عشان عيب تقولي بزاز

-لا, ليش تعوني اكبر؟

-عشان كل بنت بتكبر شكل..

ــ

اعلق الصدرية, بلوزة اولى, بلوزة ثانية, بنطلون, حذاء, جاكيت, جاببيتني. درسي سيبدأ بعد خمسة دقائق, اسرع الهث, ماذا! سأبدأ ريجيما قاسيا ابتداء من اليوم. لا, ليس اليوم ربما غدا؟! لا, غدا لا يناسبني, انتظر بحجر, يضحكان شابان يمشيان جانبي, ثم يكملان حديثهما:

-المهم, شو كنت عم بقول؟ ام مبارح, انه البنت وجها حلو بس ناصحة..

-اه؟! خلص لكان شو بدك فيها.

هكذا انا, عند العادة, وما ادراكم ما هي العادة. فاجئتهم بسؤالي :

-حقا, بس بزازها كبار؟

Figure 11 During my period, I become revolutionary