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# “Palestine as a Woman”: Feminizing Resistance and Popular Literature

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*At the present time, when desires to resist are being conscripted, the rich history of historic Palestine is being devalued, and significant concepts (such as resistance) have become inferiorized, particular powerful metaphors such as “Palestine as a woman” are maintained to subvert dominant thinking that re-inscribes colonial relations, and Palestinian women have collectively defied liberation, firmly wielded the weapons of the struggle contained in their culture, spoken a united language of resistance, and unearthed the colonial cultural matrix by feminizing resistance. The significance of the representation of Palestinian women in popular literary works reverberates in the symbols of Palestine, Beirut, Resistance, and the Palestinian Uprising (Intifada). Three renowned Palestinian intellectuals whose work informed the popular and national liberation discourse after the Nakba (the occupation of Palestine in 1948) have elaborated significantly on the interlacing of social and national liberation in the case of Palestine and, by implication, have contributed to the formation of women’s gender identity: the metaphor of “Palestine as a woman and women as Palestine” is found in the works of the novelist Ghassan Kanafani, the cartoonist Naji al-Ali, and the poet Mahmoud Darwish. This article offers a framework for understanding the significance of this powerful metaphor as it developed in the context of conflict and war in Palestine. Using a grounded theory approach, the authors analyze selected popular literary works and explore how women’s world is woven into the practice of everyday resistance, or “feminized resistance.” This process involves reconfiguring a pattern—away from Western gender politics—by confronting the rigid dichotomy of public versus private domains, de-framing domestic responsibilities, de-constraining national identity, and re-imagining feminism within the context of national oppression. The authors use James C. Scott’s hypothesis that “hidden transcripts,” or the undeclared, essentially individual forms of women’s resistance, create a culture, a movement, a nation of resistance.*

*Key words: feminizing resistance, “Palestine as a woman,” nativist nostalgia, homeland, exile*

*À l’heure actuelle, quand les désirs de résister sont mobilisés, la riche histoire de la Palestine historique est dévaluée. Des concepts importantes, comme la résistance*

*sont maintenant infériorisés, et des métaphores particulièrement puissantes, telle que la représentation de la « Palestine comme femme » sont maintenues pour saper la pensée dominante qui ré-inscrit les relations coloniales. Collectivement, les femmes palestiniennes ont fait face à la libération, en maniant fermement les armes de la lutte contenues dans leur culture, en parlant le langage unifié de la résistance, et en mettant au grand jour la matrice culturelle coloniale en féminisant la résistance. L'importance de la représentation des femmes palestiniennes dans les œuvres littéraires populaires résonne dans les symboles de la Palestine, de Beyrouth, de la Résistance et du soulèvement palestinien (l'Intifada). Trois intellectuels palestiniens de renom dont le travail a nourri le discours de libération nationale et populaire après la Nakba (l'occupation de la Palestine en 1948) ont développé de manière significative les intrications entre la libération sociale et la nationale dans le cas de la Palestine et ont contribué par là à la formation de l'identité de genre des femmes. On trouve la métaphore de la « Palestine comme femme » et des « femmes comme Palestine » dans les œuvres du romancier Ghassan Kanafani, du caricaturiste Naji al-Ali, et du poète Mahmoud Darwish. Cet article propose un cadre interprétatif pour comprendre la signification de cette puissante métaphore telle qu'elle a évolué dans le contexte de conflit et de guerre en Palestine. En utilisant une approche par le biais de la théorie ancrée, les auteurs analysent certaines œuvres littéraires populaires et explorent comment le monde des femmes est intégré dans la pratique de la résistance quotidienne ou de la « résistance féminisée ». Ce processus implique la reconfiguration d'un motif qui – en s'éloignant de la politique occidentale du genre – défie la dichotomie rigide entre les domaines du public et du privé, recadre les responsabilités domestiques, libère l'identité nationale, et imagine le féminisme sous un autre angle dans le contexte de l'oppression nationale. Les auteurs utilisent l'hypothèse de James C. Scott que les « transcriptions cachées » ou non-déclarées, essentiellement des formes individuelles de résistance féminine, créent une culture, un mouvement et une nation de résistance.*

*Mots clés : féminiser la résistance, « la Palestine comme femme », nostalgie nativiste, patrie, exil, Palestine*

### Introduction

We have on this earth what makes life worth living: on this earth, the Lady of Earth, mother of all beginnings and ends. *She was called Palestine.* Her name later became Palestine. My Lady, because you are my Lady, I deserve life.  
—Mahmoud Darwish, “On This Earth”

While the constant reinvention of the category of gender and the formation of gender relations might seem, in its most radical form, a site of social antagonism and conflict, it becomes a less orthodox process when it takes place in the context of colonial relations. These processes not only become highly entwined with national liberation but may even signify the success or failure of the whole liberation venture. The hegemonic repre-

sentations of women in political literature and literary and cultural forms signify not only the agenda discrepancy of the various social forces involved in the anti-colonial struggle but also their perception of the nature of the colonial venture itself (e.g., colonial relations vs. colonial boots on the ground). Therefore, investigating hegemonic representations of women at various stages may reveal the state and conditions of the anti-colonial and liberation scheme.

Reconsidering the status and role of women in national biographies is central to rewriting national histories and exposing the male- and elite-oriented accounts to justify and reinforce existing gender and class relations. Equally important is the impact of research on gender that uncritically accepts Western frameworks, concepts, and meanings of gender as universal. Palestinian women may see themselves transforming their collective identity and gender roles, challenge dominant accounts of their history, and thus offer alternative versions of the national past. Are Palestinian women reproducing the nation? (For an argument that women are biological, cultural, and symbolic reproducers of the nation, see Yuval-Davis 1997.)

The ideological significance of studying representations in academic discourse is to bring to the forefront the ignored role of women in cultural resistance, as symbols of the homeland, and the suppressive ways in which colonial spatial relations are constituted as gendered. Mills (2005) examines the possibilities of developing a materialist feminist analysis of representational and lived space. She draws attention to the differences between Western feminism and indigenous women, though the latter had a role in the way Western women defined themselves spatially within the colonial context. In addition, "the ideological strictures on women's movement within the colonial zone were important in shaping a notion of a woman's place" (2005, 68). Thus, any discourse on representation needs to be based on indigenous materialist re-evaluation of spatial relations.

No analysis of the discourse of representation can be comprehensive if ideologies are not perceived as embedded in processes of globalization and how gender serves as a resource for capital. Gender is embedded in the process of restructuring and in ongoing global processes (Connell 2000). This also implies that in core countries, as Connell suggests, institutions are gendered and, in turn, directly influence masculinity in the periphery. Palestinian women in the periphery inherit the low value of domestic labour that is maintained by globalization and transform it into a practice of resistance to occupation. Mohanty (2002) shows that colonized men were in fact "feminized" by European occupiers.

Resistance to colonialism and to processes of globalization that oppress women in the periphery has created forms of gendered spheres of resistance. But this is not done by feminizing domestic and private spheres

and masculinizing the public sphere. The irony is that Palestinian women, as we will discuss, feminized resistance, or made up a disproportionate number of those who contributed to the resistance, simply because distinctions between public and private were blurred. We argue below that reproducing the feminization of resistance is a function of feminizing the landscape in concepts such as “Palestine as a woman.” To bring space into the analysis, and to avoid the taken-for-granted Western concepts and constructions of the category of gender, we must identify the counter-hegemonic conceptualization and discourse.

There are implications to this indeed. What may be viewed as a distortion of Western conceptualizations is in fact a reshaping of Palestinian women’s representations and the construction of a resistance ritual that shaped their daily lives. This is not to suggest that men are not resisting, but we live in times—under the Palestinian Authority—in which the meaning of national resistance to occupation come to be equated with terrorism as part of this silencing of the subaltern. Within this context, feminizing resistance becomes an important venue for preserving the integrity of indigenous knowledges. It was probably less significant in the pre-Oslo era. Palestinian women have constituted a self-conscious voice of dissent, revived the language of resistance, preserved the internal integrity of indigenous culture, and basically practised cultural resistance in their everyday lives.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2005, 324) writes that “Palestinian women are the unrecognized frontline fighters who, if acknowledged, could reveal a different reality by presenting a different voice and a revisionist discourse.” In an interview, a Gazan woman tells her story:

I am like all other Palestinian women that live in Gaza and survived. I will not die from poverty either but I am stronger when I see our men resist those who killed my son Ahmad. I am a proud mother. I recall how my son before he was killed asked me to take him to the amusement park but I told him we cannot go because we do not have the money for it but he left the house and a bomb shell fell on him (Interview with authors, 2013).

We do not present ethnographic work in this article, but we stress the need to do such work. Palestinian women, we argue, have continued their “ideological resistance,” manifested in efforts to reconstitute a “shattered community, to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of the colonial system” (Said 1993, 209). The cultural resistance symbolism in Palestinian women that has significantly characterized the period since the 1948 Nakba, we argue, has many practical implications, ranging from blurring the private and private domains to transcending domestic labour as a tool for collective behaviour.

It is worth noting here that in the present Palestinian Authority era,

scholars have identified some shifts in women’s self-representation, but this is due to the weakening of the links between everyday struggles for family and community survival and political resistance (see Johnson 2009). We do not suggest that this analysis is faulty but, rather, build on it. Johnson (2009) revises the three categories of women’s self-representation introduced by Sayyigh (1998): the “struggle personality,” characterized by strength, courage, and resourcefulness; the “confrontational personality” that is the generation of the revolution; and the “witness to tragedy” personality. Johnson (2009) explores a shift in the iconic image of women in the Palestinian national struggle as the mother of the martyr and maternal sacrifice as a symbol of the extent of Palestinian loss and suffering, explaining the reasons for the shift:

Yet the erosion of solidarity, trust in the Palestinian national project, and the capacities of its leadership narrows her field of action to her own family and constricts her abilities even there ... Both the hard necessity of public struggle and dreams of domesticity sit uneasily in the selves ... But for both, the public is deeply troubled and the domestic highly threatened. What remains is persistence, a crucial element of Palestinian survival but one infected by contradiction and marked by a deep uncertainty about the future (Johnson 2009, 44–45).

It is for exactly this reason that this article was conceptualized. It may not delve into this uncertainty, but does counter it by reviving the symbolic culture of resistance in “Palestine as a woman.” This article complements our work elsewhere (Khoury and Dana 2012), which aims to enhance the visibility of settler colonialism’s impact on the internal landscape (how the mind is colonized). In that earlier article we show that there is an unexamined quest to supplant an imperial subjectivity, but that a self-conscious voice is embedded in the indigenous culture. Here we discuss the inherent rationality for feminizing resistance in the concept of “Palestine as a woman.” We have defined resistance as “a deliberate exclusion of ‘others’ as a means of preserving internal integrity of indigenous knowledge” (Khoury and Dana 2012, 189). One indigenous Palestinian construction of the national homeland is the “Palestine as a woman” concept and the discourse around it.

### **The Subaltern’s Collective Defiance**

Few studies have discussed gendering landscape (see Falkiner 1992). *Landscape* here refers to a representation of anything with an imagined space, but how gendering the homeland affects the conception of resistance remains unexplored, especially in the context of the Palestinian cause. The discourse on the land as a Palestinian lady (as Darwish writes, “because you are my lady I deserve life ...”) after the Nakba may echo

other discourses in the West, where the association between land and gender is made in notions such as “Mother Nature,” but we argue that the land of Palestine has been inscribed with a representation that associates the discourse of the occupation with women, so it is commonly called “raped land” (as opposed to “occupied land”). Therefore, our main premise here is that this discourse (Palestine as a woman) constructs Palestinian women as national signifiers, whereas both *al-ard* (the land) and gender are initially cultural constructs. The characterization of *al-ard* in literary works, we argue, has a direct bearing on Palestinian women’s self-identification and representation. These representations have been further invested in perceptions of women as courageous, patient, and loyal.

The cultural representation of Palestinian women in popular literary works reverberates in the symbols of Palestine, Beirut, and the Palestinian uprising (intifada), constituting the homeland as a signifier of women. This, we argue, has shaped and constantly reshapes consciousness of Palestinian women’s representation in the nation. The significance of “Palestine as a woman” is to make the land a national signifier. The expressive culture of resistance, as reflected by the popular and classical literary works of three renowned Palestinian intellectuals whose work informed the popular discourse after the 1948 Nakba, especially contributed to the formation of women’s gender frame. The theme of “Palestine as a woman and women as Palestine” in the work of the novelist Ghassan Kanafani, the cartoonist Najji al-Ali, and the poet Mahmoud Darwish contributed to “feminizing resistance” (intifada as female) or the de-gendered construction of resistance, which involves reconfiguring a pattern—not patterned around Western gender politics—by de-constraining the re-imagining of feminism within the context of national and colonial oppression.

Fiction and other literary works, we argue, have direct implications for Palestinian women’s self-identification and representation, but Palestinian women have extended those undeclared activities (see Scott 1985, 1990, on “hidden transcripts”), essentially surrounding individual forms of women’s resistance, and have thus managed to create a culture, a movement, a nation of resistance. In other words, particular discourses that feminized resistance can also explain why Palestinian women are reproducing their nation (see Yuval-Davis 1997). There is a relationship between the political dispossession of Palestinians as an outcome of the 1948 Nakba and the production of a political discourse conducive to feminizing resistance.

Reconsidering the status and role of women in national biographies is central to rewriting national histories and exposing how they are often represented by male- and elite-oriented accounts to justify and reinforce



existing gender and class relations. Equally important is the impact of research on gender that uncritically accepts Western frameworks, concepts, and meanings of gender. Palestinian women may see themselves transforming their collective identity and gender roles and challenging dominant accounts of history, and thus may offer alternative versions of the national past. How is the discourse of "Palestine as a woman" furthering their efforts to reproduce the nation (see Yuval-Davis 1997) in a special way not found in the West? The next section delves into the representation of Palestinian women.

### **Palestinian Women Foreground the Accountability of Palestinian Symbols**

Human geography concerns itself with, among other things, how humans represent land; cultural geography concerns itself with social and issues in the contingent nature of culture and forms of resistance. One way of bridging the two, as suggested by Jackson (2000), is by rematerializing social and cultural geography. This transcendence may represent the best framework for this article because the material basis—the land of historic Palestine—exists no matter who calls this land what. "Palestine as a woman" transmits through culture to many generations and continually reshapes the representation of women. Concurrently, resistance has become a central theme of contemporary social and cultural geography (Pile and Keith 1997). There are obvious connections between human emplacement and impersonal geographies; because resistance is not located in certain practices or places, we find that the mapping of resistance is achieved by attending to its outcomes.

Western assumptions and discourses on the gendered nature of nationalism were thoroughly argued by feminist scholars in the 1990s (see Lake 1992; McClintock 1995) who entertained the conceptualization of nationalist identity as a male phenomenon and project. Challenging this notion by attending to strong national sentiments among women or other venues of research is not futile, but nor is it necessary. In the very special circumstances of the Palestinian cause, we argue, the identity of women has been interwoven with the notion of "Palestine as a woman," as hypothesized in the popular and classic literature of the Nakba of 1948.

Jean-Klein (2001), aware of the relationship between nationalism and gender, proposes a seminal argument that should have led the discipline in a new direction and, in our view, does not follow the Western path. It is not necessarily true that the gendering of the nation exists in the Third World—especially in nations that remain under colonial rule. Jean-Klein in fact proposes that in the available analysis of the nationalizing process, there is a determined politics of nationalism, as if it were deter-

mined or inscribed, and people lack authentic interest in nationalist activism. It is not prescribed/inscribed on the people, but Palestinian women practised domestic self-nationalization (her argument will be reiterated in other parts below).

Jean-Klein references some scholars (Brubaker 1996) who have perceived a new mission for nationalism studies in post-colonial settings.<sup>1</sup> In general, subaltern studies allow for an indigenous interpretation of processes and cultural constructs, because these settings are inextricably connected with colonial struggles. “Thus it now stands as a fact that Third World or postcolonial nationalisms do not add up to the same phenomenon as ‘nationalism’ in its (notorious) Western expressions: They are not ethnicity-focused, not exclusive, not Other-oppressive, and not hegemonic: they are subaltern, self-liberational, and virtuous” (Jean-Klein 2001, 85). In sum, she calls for referencing transformative agency as opposed to discursive determined agency. Abu-Lughod (1990, 42) argues that the importance of looking at resistance is as “diagnostic of power.” Resistance must become feminized so that its oeuvre is maintained.

### **Rising Above the Staged Drama: Background in Refugee Studies**

Studies of urban Palestinian women who are educated and politically active seem to be appealing to many, but such studies cannot include women living in the Gaza Strip (see Roy 1986), refugee camps in the West Bank (see Rubenberg 2001), or refugees in the Arab world (see Sayyigh 1998). Anthropologists have provided valuable ethnographies and explored how Palestinian women in refugee camps in Lebanon define themselves as minorities to accommodate their isolation from the larger Palestinian context and protest their powerlessness in the local Lebanese context as a strategy of survival (Peteet 1992). Because Palestinian refugee women saw national oppression as predominant, consciousness of class and gender oppression remained in the background.

Palestinian women rose above the staged drama before their inferiority was epidermalized. Resistance to colonization has redefined gender roles among Palestinian women.<sup>2</sup> The Nakba of 1948 did not have equal effects on different geographical areas; unusually, cities today tend to be more conservative in their perception of women’s roles. Before the Nakba, some Palestinian cities had cultural centres, cultural production, and literary work that surpassed those of most other Arab cities at the time. For example, Haifa had movie theatres, cultural centres, a film industry, and some of the best poets in the Arab world, including Ibrahim Tukan of Nablus, author of the poem “Mawtini” (“My Home”), one of the most recited contemporary poems and the national anthem of some Arab countries. Cities in Palestine, as everywhere else, were more developed and

progressive than rural areas, and when the Zionist movement occupied Palestine, they intentionally demolished a dozen cities in Palestine and no less than 418 rural localities (Khalidi 1992; Falah 1996). Significantly, according to Susan Slyomovics (1998, 208), the “Palestinian woman [metamorphic ally] is made to stand for the destroyed villages and dispossessed land. She represents the ‘national allegory’ of the lost Palestine homeland in much literary and visual imagery as the feminine sphere reproducing, literally and figuratively, the nation.”

The new environment in the Palestinian refugee camps (in the diaspora or in the West Bank) after the Nakba forced women to redefine gender roles; in particular, they had to seek jobs and contribute to their livelihood. In fact, urban women lagged behind women in the refugee camps in terms of their gender roles. Resistance and the hegemony of nationalist and leftist ideologies also redefined women’s roles. The resistance that developed 17 years later, with the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), was detached from that cultural base and delayed by its abolition. The core of the revolution was in the camps—inside and outside Palestine—and political activism spread out mostly in refugee camps and much less in cities. A portion of the progressive ideologies was born there and grew rapidly in this new isolated environment. This explains why cities lagged behind when women in refugee camps were developing their gender roles more progressively. The resistance, and most of the popular literature, perceived women as equal, and this affected Palestinian communities to a significant extent.

Peteet (1992) explores the stability and fragility of women’s socio-political advancement under changing political, organizational, and economic conditions. During the period of the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon, structures of gender domination were reproduced and transformed at the same time, and the effect of the resistance on gendered forms of power and the division of labour was uneven. Similarly, one can argue that the peculiar circumstances of exilic existence crystallized both a female political consciousness and, perhaps, a feminist sensibility. The alienation of exile and revolutionary nationalism could not help but transform relations between men and women, as well as those among women themselves.

In a recent paradigm shift, “feminists have extended the framing of social rights to include family and domestic rights and responsibilities ... While some theorists continue to ignore the spheres of home ... There is a growing body of theoretical and empirical literature that has sought to incorporate questions of home and family” (Hobson, Lewis, and Siim 2002, 46). Coontz (1998), writing on the rise of domestic ideology in Victorian England, argues that it was middle-class Victorians who instilled the idea of the family as quintessentially the women’s domain.

The notion of public versus private domains, therefore, does not typically apply to disadvantaged and poor women (see Weintraub and Kumar 1997). This distinction, we argue, is not strong among marginalized Palestinian women; the lines between public and private spaces and gendered activities are blurred. The conditions of refugee status, with its miserable economic situation, provided new opportunities and culturally acceptable roles for women in education, work, and other spheres.

Three points should be emphasized here. First, we view Palestinian women as being virtually beyond any arbitrary political geography; Palestinian women's bodies, we believe, cross the political borders, and they have a collective trans-identity through their similar socio-political economic context. This is why we consider the subjects constituted and addressed in this study to be trans-border bodies that cross territorial boundaries. While the occupation dispersed Palestinian bodies, nonetheless their common refugee status and the representation of women in popular literature formed a collective gender identity, as we will explore in this article.

Second, we chose the most popular literary voices of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that represented the subaltern at the time: Najji al-Ali, Ghassam Kanafani, and the poet laureate of Palestine, Mahmoud Darwish. The writings of many Palestinian feminists are not ignored or underrepresented, but they do not fit the time frame or the topic we are addressing—that of resistance. For example, Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* ([1975] 1985) includes the viewpoint of women involved in writing the history of resistance. However, due to the limits of this article, we do not include their valuable work.

Third, we focus here on providing a synchronic image at a particular point in time when the notion of "Palestine as a woman" was invigorated, the status of Palestinian woman was rejuvenated, and, most importantly, resistance was feminized. This article is a contribution to the investigation of a cultural product and norm (Palestine as a woman) in relation to a place and time (historic Palestine); of the way in which a cultural phenomenon remains constant from one place to another (feminization of resistance); and of how Palestinian women functioned spatially based on the cultural product (a collective Palestinian women's trans-border identity). The sections that follow present our methodology, set out the theoretical framework of the study, and deconstruct the presumption of binary gender roles before presenting our findings.

### **Methodology**

When examining the relationships between resistance and conflict or war, scholars may, in general, understand gender in accordance with Western

conceptions. Gender politics may involve more than managing dominance and dissent. What emerges is a tendency to view gender solely as a form of domination, which may lead critical scholars to devalue resistance without understanding the deep structures of power, national conflict, and colonial relations, and thus to overlook the everyday acts of resistance accorded to women themselves. We argue that individual forms of resistance may become a vigorous form of collective resistance. Because of this complexity, it is not possible to employ any deductive methodology that begins with a theory. The most meaningful and appropriate methodology, therefore, is a grounded theory approach, which allows for understanding agency by emphasizing its distinctive gender attributions. A grounded approach allowed us to formulate a proposition based on conceptual ideas. With constant comparisons, we developed generalized relationships and made inductions until we reached a theoretical saturation.

Another reason for considering this an appropriate approach is that grounded theory avoids pre-conceptualizations and definitions of gender that are predominantly Western in origin and orientation; it curbs the tendency to go too far in either accepting or dismissing the notion of gender equality. Yet even with this approach, disagreements may impose themselves as a reflection of the binary of agency and structure when we think they could be reinforcing each other. We contend that concepts may be mutually constitutive. The following section discusses the theoretical framework we arrived at as a result of the process of finding generalized relationships between concepts.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Clear sexual division in war, however, usually disappears when there is no clear difference between "battlefront" and the "home front" (Yuval-Davis 1997).

In his formulation of "everyday forms of resistance," Scott (1985) focuses on the undeclared essential forms of resistance that create "a culture, a movement, a nation" of resistance. In his work on the "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1990), he explores subtle activities that require no coordination—and have the advantage of falling short of open defiance. These actions (e.g., reproduction) rarely have social significance individually, but collectively they are significant. Following Scott, Abu-Lughod (1990), in her work on the romance of resistance, and other feminist scholars and women-centred studies of gender resistance in everyday life have viewed the domestic realm as a site of political expression. Feminist analyses theorize motherhood and women's domestic activities as a form

of incipient or substitutive emancipatory activism (Werbner 1999). Resistance is thus present, but not in the eyes of the colonizer or of the dominant, elite, and powerful. Scott's term "hidden transcripts" refers also to more symbolic things such as the bondage and insulation that are based on Palestinian women's own distinct ways of being and knowing. Thus, in the long run, these small, subtle acts continually and cumulatively promote significant movement toward meaningful manifestations of change. A ritual is developed as an outcome of women's collective identity. For example, there is a cultural expression of "sacrifice" involving an ethos of non-celebration, which represents what Scott (1990) calls "weapons of the weak." This constitutes a technique of resistance specific to Palestinian women.

Jean-Klein (2001) analyzed the Palestinian practice of suspending everyday life as a form of *domestic self-nationalization* as well as a form of resistance. This practice, she contends, has hegemonic as well as liberatory overtones. Her "thick description" of the Palestinian case demonstrates that

domestic, familial, and personal activism can in specific situations work as coeval partner to formally organized efforts, that the continuity of domestic activity with collective political action is not invariably a gender-specific phenomenon or exclusively counter-hegemonic, and that "subalternness" is a relational and situational positioning, not a determinate geopolitical space and moral zone (Jean-Klein 2001, 91).

Domestic self-nationalization, for Jean-Klein, is a process "wherein ordinary persons fashion themselves into nationalized subjects, using distinctive narrative actions and embodied practices that are woven into the practice of everyday life" (2001, 91).

In our view, because resistance is part of the everyday lives of Palestinian women in refugee camps, their activism can indeed have both oppressive and emancipatory effects. Abu-Lughod's (1990) conception of "romanticizing resistance" and Jean-Klein's (2001) "domestic self-nationalization," which is based on everyday political activism, project a different nationalism than is inscribed and engraved by the elite women's movement and the Palestinian Authority. Inspired by Scott's (1990) "hidden transcripts," we combined the two major concepts and introduced what we define as "feminizing resistance." In order to address and contextualize this complex issue, we will deconstruct the presumption of a gender-role binary in "doing resistance" among marginalized women and elaborate on the development of ritualized forms of resistance.

### Deconstructing the Presumption of a Gender Role Binary

Feminism in its third wave transgresses boundaries through “deconstructing the presumption of a gender binary or the conventional ways of doing politics” (Alldred and Dennison 2000, 126).

Questions such as “Can Muslim women become empowered and emancipated?” or “Can you be a feminist while being veiled?” are faulty and inherently Eurocentric. Collective identities should be continually negotiated in relation to their imagined audiences and should never be permanently fixed. For example, Johnson and Kuttab (2001) contend that informal women’s activism has taken the form of an extension of women’s roles, particularly in the first intifada, when older women sheltered youth and defied soldiers.

“While in the 1990s, US women were appropriately taken up with different projects to do with continuing to improve gender equality and organizing around women’s needs, women in the rest of the world were in different situations, with different needs and agendas” (Kaplan 2003, 10). Ien Ang (1995, 57) writes that “non-white, non-Western women in ‘white/Western’ societies can only begin to speak with a hesitating ‘I’m a feminist, but ...’ in which the meaning and substance of feminism itself becomes problematized.” Some scholars have encouraged the practice of focusing on women’s responsibilities rather than on their supposed qualities; according to Hobson and Lister (2002, 26), “this approach is less likely than maternalism to lend itself to a biological essentialism that reifies the difference between women and men.” Indeed, some proponents of this view would argue that they are attempting to “de-gender” citizenship. This approach, we contend, does not reduce identity to a single position but manifests blurring the distinction between private and public realms.

Another group of scholars has taken a similar approach to investigating ecofeminism, considering the primacy of ecology in their analysis (see Gillis, Howie, and Munford 2004). Saadallah (2004) studied Muslim feminism in what came to be called a “third wave,” which refers to possessing a globalized perspective that is inclusive of commonalities while transcending difference. She writes that

this new wave of feminism represents a new generation of feminism/ists working towards constructive solution(s) to women’s situation while embracing diversity. This allows for a feminism which is non-monolithic and a feminism which responds to the emerging necessities and real issues facing women *today* rather than attempting to fit *all* women into the structures conceptualised by the second wave. This is not to reject the precepts of the second wave, but to

acknowledge that contemporary global structures and interactions require a “new” feminism. In terms of the relationship between Islam and feminism, the placing of all Islamised discourses in one basket corroborates Mojab’s argument that postfeminism is only a contemporary version of liberal feminism.

Embracing diversity entails ascertaining the diverse nature of feminism today, including Muslim feminism (Saadallah 2004, 219; original emphasis).

Saadallah (2004, 217) advocates avoiding “the binaries predominant in many feminist writings in order to delineate the similar problems which women face across borders religions and strands while advocating an expansive definition of the ‘third wave.’” This approach, in our view, maintains the authenticity of Palestinian women’s experience and self-definition and leads the way to understanding their national identities.

With respect to motherhood and the realm of domestic space, other scholars have used maternalist arguments to make the case for women’s political citizenship with reference to the qualities and values that women could bring to the political arena as mothers. For instance, according to Werbner (1999, 227), “the strength of political motherhood as an evolving social movement has been to introduce new human qualities into the public sphere and to define them as *equally* foundational in the legitimation of the political community.” Other maternalistic conceptualizations are normally confined to women but have become politically significant.

By deconstructing the presumptions of the gender binary, we can move to discussing how Palestinian women are feminizing resistance. In Western societies, resistance is a male-dominated undertaking (see Khoury 2005, 347); in Palestinian camp society, however, women perform many acts that, left undone, would have curbed the resistance. In other words, there is a relationship between the “hidden transcripts” and more overt forms of opposition, such as the boycotting of Israeli goods and home economies by the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (see Khoury 1990). However, the hidden forms of resistance require that women remain within the confines of the home—which, again, may easily be interpreted as gender inequality if viewed through a Western lens. In the lens of marginalized societies, on the other hand, this individual covert home economy has been instrumental in the success of resistance. Ganesh et al. (2005) call for greater attention to mobilizing individual actions toward the collective. We maintain that this has also contributed to seeing resistance as a woman-initiated act.

Many forms of resistance are treated as gender-specific efforts. Reproduction is one very popular technique of individual resistance that is constitutive of feminized resistance. In the Western eye, reproduction keeps women enslaved in the confines of their homes. In the context of conflict and the “demographic war,” however, it serves exactly the oppo-



site purpose: reproduction is viewed by society as an act of resistance, because more new revolutionaries are being born, but at the same time it empowers women and moves the locus of power into their hands.

Long (2006) has researched how Palestinian women heighten and dissolve boundaries politically and advance a radically different kind of political geography as women in labour are forced to give birth at Israeli military checkpoints. Their capacity to do so shows the strength of Palestinian women under occupation to challenge, dismantle, and move beyond the occupation. Long describes the behaviour of the state toward its borders using the analogy of *abjection*. At the height of abjection, or the separation of a mother from her child, she contends, the perceived (by Israel) threat of the bodies of pregnant Palestinian women is used to justify building a separation wall around Palestinian localities. She explains this relationship clearly:

A Palestinian woman giving birth at the checkpoint exposes this “natural” or “biological” process as an intensely political one as well. In birthing at the checkpoint Rula confronts and reinforces the political divide between Israel and Palestine: she is the obvious candidate for transgression of that divide and yet she finds the border as solid and sealed as Israel intended. The body has maintained its integrity against the threat posed by this birthing woman. And she is a threat. Rula may seem vulnerable and sacred but what she actually represents is both the demographic defeat of Israel and the ever present possibility of “suicide bombings” (Long 2006, 117).

Kanaaneh (2002) discusses the ways in which ideas about Palestinian women’s pregnant bodies produce and are produced by ideas about Palestinian nationhood. She demonstrates how Palestinian women bring in counter-discourses and how they express subtle methods of resistance to state power and to Jewish-Israeli nationalism. This means that Palestinian women can express a form of nationalism that is distinctively their own.

In addition, Palestinian women became very artful in managing their emotions. Palestinian women who are the mothers of martyrs—meaning any Palestinian killed by the Israeli occupation forces—celebrate the deaths of their martyred children as if they were wedding celebrations. Managing emotions effectively requires more than skill or simply imitating other women; it requires seeing oneself as a female leader in a group. This emotional display serves to move the whole community forward. Hurt, depression, and anger are downplayed—which is not to say that they do not take their toll on women’s health. Here, Palestinian women are “feminizing resistance.”

“Feminizing resistance” in Palestinian society became a ritual. The different forms of Palestinian women’s activism have attracted the atten-

tion of a number of scholars (see Sabbagh 1998). Some explore how home and community environments were daily sites of conflict with Israeli soldiers and how the extension of women's roles in the first intifada was possible because the division between combatants and non-combatants was very fluid. During the second intifada, most combatants were male, so women's reproductive role as bearers of the fighters, a politicized role already present in Palestinian political culture, was heightened, and the mother of the martyr became a potent symbol of resistance (Johnson and Kuttab 2001).

Martyrdom is a constructed form of resistance that is ritualized, not in terms of the gender of those martyred, but in terms of the gender of those who absorb the grave shock of losing their family members and, at the same time, reproduce others. Very few scholars have addressed the issue of martyrdom when analyzing the relationship between gender and political transformation in societies beset by high levels of violence. Pitcher (1998) identifies the cultural and psychological processes that make Palestinian martyrdom possible within the specific context of Israeli military occupation. Martyrdom elaborates the ritual, narrative, and symbolic dimensions of a practice that exists within a Palestinian discourse of sacrifice and of national liberation. One of Pitcher's interviews shows the "ritualized ways" in which young Palestinian women defend young men:

The *shebab* [Palestinian activist youth] began to throw stones. Then the shooting started. One boy was shot dead.... Maha's fiancé picked up the body and started a funeral procession to the cemetery. The soldiers called a curfew, but no one paid attention. They moved in on the procession. Maha told the shebab to flee and tried to slow the encroaching soldiers. She stopped to confront them. They backed her into a corner. She began fighting with them hand to hand. They said, "Stop resisting or we'll shoot." "Then shoot me," she said and made a break to escape them. She ran ten meters before they fired and Maha fell.

—Maha Hamdi, 19 years old, martyred December 11, 1987, as told by her brother, September 5, 1991, Nablus City, the West Bank (Pitcher 1998, 27).

Swedenburg (1990) explores the significant role of peasant women as central figures in Palestine's expressive culture and historiography. He explores how the signifier of the peasant woman is used to construct a unified Palestinian history and how this unifying function works ideologically to cover significant differences within Palestinian society. Sa'ar (2006) has particularly studied the discourse on women's power among Palestinians inside the 1948 territories, where women are referred to as *qawiyi* (strong), referring to a feminine strength that is preoccupied with this collective identity as an ongoing moral existence. The struggling

Palestinian woman is commonly identified as *qawiyyi* (strong), *shuga'a* (courageous), and *saboura* (patient). Such representation of women emanates from the national discourse of the Nakba, and this popular discourse challenges many existing gender roles but has become a strategy for survival.

### Literary Works of al-Ali, Kanafani, and Darwish

In the previous section we deconstructed the rigid dichotomy of public versus private domains, de-framed domestic responsibilities, and de-constrained the re-imagining of feminism in the context of Palestinian national oppression. In this section we attend to how Scott's (1985, 1990) hypothesized “hidden transcripts,” the undeclared, essentially individual forms of resistance, created a culture, a movement, a *nation of resistance*. We will integrate the work of a novelist, a poet, and a cartoonist into the discussion of how Palestinian women created a nation of resistance and thus feminized resistance. The works of these three popular literary writers, in fact, mirror the conditions that began with the Nakba and, at the same time, shaped and constructed a feminized reality of resistance. These two are in dialectical correlation—that is, they interact and reproduce each other simultaneously.

#### *Naji al-Ali*

Naji al-Ali (1937–87) was born in Al Shajarah, a village near Tiberias that was destroyed in 1948, and was forced to leave with his family during the Nakba; they travelled to Ein el-Helweh refugee camp in south Lebanon. His artistic career began in the late 1950s; he became the most popular artist in the Arab world. He was always a defender of poor, ordinary people and a critic of oppression and despotism. As a signature to his famous cartoons he used the very popular and iconic Handala, a symbol of Palestinian identity and defiance and an image of the Palestinian struggle. His cartoons are very simple but deliver a sharp critique. They are understood by the general public and are representative of their plight.

Women are a dominant presence in Naji al-Ali's cartoons. He always engaged women in debates and always took a progressive stand, even on gender issues. Al-Ali's women fight for the people's rights and get back their pride. Fatima, his main character, is always the conscience of her husband, who is part of the revolution. She always straightens his path and is mindful of his words as he begins to withdraw. Most of the cartoons have historical and political significance. The Palestinian woman constantly awakens her husband's mind from becoming defeated – here the male represents the Arab regimes' defeatist positions



FIGURE 1  
"Good Morning Beirut" by Najji al-Ali

Fatima is also the poor Palestinian mother who loses her son in the resistance, the oppressed, Ein el-Helweh refugee camp in Lebanon, the southern Lebanese woman, Egypt that refuses Camp David, Beirut that held the Palestinian fighters, a fighter in the war zones, and, lastly, the strong pole that survived the departure of Palestinian fighters from Lebanon in 1982 (el-Fakeeh 2011). She has strong anti-bourgeois views, debates Security Council Resolution 242, and mourns when the Israeli flag is raised in Cairo, all with sarcasm laced with some humour. She plants the seeds of hope, patience, resistance, and life. She is the positive and the nation's brain.

Fatima's role as a homemaker, a mother, a passionate woman who sacrifices everything for her family, never impedes her from joining the revolution. Fatima shares her political opinions and refuses to let go of



FIGURE 2  
“Palestinian Woman” by Naji al-Ali

the key to the home that was taken from her family during the Nakba. Fatima is the land that was stolen and raped.

The Palestinian woman is central in the conflict; she is the people, the refugee camp, the intifada, the South, Sour city, Saida city, Sabra refugee camp (el-Yakoobi 2006). She is the proud mother, the international, the national, and the humane. She makes bread in the morning, but the fire beneath it is lit with daily newspapers that she thinks they should put behind them to move on in the path of freedom. In Figures 1–3 we see Beirut as a woman to whom a flower is given (Figure 1); pregnant, with a resistance symbol (*keffiyeh*) around her neck (Figure 2); and carrying the injured from the refugee camps to a safe haven (Figure 3).

#### *Ghassan Kanafani*

Ghassan Kanafani (1936–72) was born in Akka (Acre) and was one of the most popular and legendary novelists. His stories are performed as plays in schools and theatres and have been translated into many languages. He is considered the people’s conscience and the philosopher of the revolution.

One of Kanafani’s most famous novels is *Um Saad* (“Mother of Saad”), published in 1969. *Um Saad*, the protagonist, narrates the life of ordinary Palestinian women who do extraordinary things. She is a woman who struggles to sustain the basic daily needs, socializes her children to



FIGURE 3  
"Noah's Ark" by Naji al-Ali

join the resistance, and at times acts as the philosopher of the revolution. In some sense, Um Saad herself is the Palestinian revolution.

Kanafani pictures the mother emanating from the interior of the precious land. With her roots under the earth, the land is always fertile, and the olive trees do not need to be watered. She suffers everything that Palestinians suffered in exile and after expulsion. Um Saad's portrait is the typography of the geographical territory: historic Palestine. Kanafani describes her body, its colour, and its fragrance like the fertile land with its trees and branches. When she is injured, Kanafani describes her wounds and says that her blood is like "the fragrance of resistance." She is the homeland, and the homeland is her. She is a symbol of power, walks with her head raised, and refuses to kneel because when the mother kneels or becomes submissive, the whole nation is lost, and if she is weak, the whole nation will fall. She is the hope of a scattered nation.

Um Saad, originally a peasant, is in her forties and lives in Burj el-Barajneh refugee camp, where she has to work cleaning big buildings for little pay and work in people's homes so that she can provide for the family's basic needs when her husband is unemployed. The misery of living in the refugee camp and the harsh living do not break her pride but amplify her patience, stubbornness, and will.

To maintain the Palestinian race and continuity and increase their population in the face of genocides and forced migrations, there was a

need to reproduce. This has become a form of resistance, or what we call a feminized construction of resistance. Here the role of Palestinian women is very important, because fertility and reproduction are an important weapon. Giving birth to fighters who will join the resistance is a female responsibility by nature. Um Saad raises Saad, her only son, and after 20 years sends him to join the resistance. On the day he goes off to the 1967 war, she says that she wishes she had 10 of Saad who would join the resistance. Saad crosses the border from Lebanon to historic Palestine, with much happiness. Saad represents the seed that women throw on the fertile land, the refugees, and the hope for return.

Place and time have a clear function in the Palestinian novel:

Um Saad embodies a deep sharp feeling as time goes on, the role of time in the life of this character becomes clear. The novel is a novel of the rising Palestinian time that Um Saad represents. Here she lives in this spacious new time that corresponds with new space (the other tent), after she contributed to building them. The novel expressed this new time and its effect on Um Saad: “like a clock beat it came. This woman comes always ascending from the core of the land.” She lives in an ascending time that denotes the popular revolution. This time refreshed her torn soul, and brought back her appetite to life, lightened the new generation’s path, and the dream became true (el-Shami 2009).

Um Saad does not believe in any supernatural powers and knows that only her actions will help her. This point is also clear in Kanafani’s unfinished story “The Blind and the Deaf” (1972). What brought Um Saad to existence are the conditions of the contradictory refugee status, the resistance that counters defeat. In Kanafani’s other novels, such as *Men in the Sun* (1963), we see the double burden on women as homemakers and labourers. Under colonization, Kanafani illuminates the social and national oppression of Palestinian women; in letters to Ghada al-Samman we see his highly progressive view on the status of women. In his unfinished novel *Barkook Nisan* (“April’s Plums,” 1972), Kanafani introduces Sua’d from the West Bank, who receives her education in political science and joins the resistance. She then becomes a leader in the resistance and represents the smart, cautious, and resourceful women.

#### *Mahmoud Darwish*

Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) was born in the village of Birweh in the upper Galilee. He is an internationally acclaimed, popular, and progressive poet who shares similar themes with Kanafani and al-Ali.

Womanhood is a grand symbol in Darwish’s work. According to Masoud (2010), one of the important themes of his work is

the motherhood topic and its symbolic reference to home. This celebration of land and referring to it as a mother was a necessity in Palestine in the twenty years following the Nakba; it provided an easier connection between social and national themes. This is demonstrated in one of Mahmoud Darwish's poem[s. ] *Ila Ommi* "To My Mother" [1996] ... [This poem] is considered to be a core pamphlet in the building of the literature of resistance. This is because of the writer's ability to connect both the theme of motherhood and nationhood at times when writing about the latter could lead to imprisonment.

Darwish's poem "To My Mother" (1996) clearly exhibits the connection that Masoud (2010) is making:

I yearn for my mother's bread  
 My mother's coffee,  
 My mother's touch  
 And childhood grows inside me  
 Day upon breast of day  
 And I love my life because  
 If I died  
 I'd feel ashamed because of my mother's tears  
 Take me (mother), if one day I return,  
 As a veil for your lashes  
 And cover my bones with grass  
 Baptised by the purity of your heel  
 And fasten my bonds  
 With a lock made of your hair  
 With a piece of thread that trails in the train of your dress  
 Maybe I'd become a god  
 A god I'd become  
 If I touched the depths of your heart  
 Put me, if I return,  
 As fuel in your cooking stove,  
 As a clothes line on your rooftop  
 For I have lost resolve  
 Without your daily prayer  
 I have grown decrepit: Give me back the stars of childhood  
 That I may join  
 The young birds  
 On the return route  
 To the nest of your waiting

—Mahmoud Darwish, 1996 (trans. Masoud 2010)

In this and many other poems, Darwish refers to his mother and to women baking bread, an image that became emblematic of Palestinian daily culture. He provides a picture of a peasant woman waking up early



to prepare bread for her children, transforming a chore as part of domestic labour and constructing it as fundamental to ongoing life. Bread is like life. The poem continues into stronger images of both motherhood and "Palestinianism" or "Arabism" when the poet talks about the beauty of the Arabic woman who veils her face.

In his poem "The Land," Darwish writes: "I am the land ... the land is you.... Khadija! Do not close the door ... do not go into coma ... we will expel them from the bottle and the laundry wire ... we will expel them from this path, we will expel them from the Galilee space" (our translation). Here again the stones and the path represent the resistance.

Abdel Hadi (2009) contends that feminizing poems are found in ancient Arab poetry in discourses with homeland, but modern poetry describes the homeland in many different ways. However, Darwish used women and the female narrative of resistance in a number of his works. For example, she is the homeland: "My homeland is not a baggage, and I am not leaving, I am in love and the land is my (woman) lover" (our translation). A woman symbolizes the land and the home: "Your eyes are saved in my eyes, I adore them and I protect them from the wind" (our translation).

### **Conclusion**

In current times, when desires to resist are being conscripted, the rich history of historic Palestine is being devalued, and significant concepts (including resistance) have become inferiorized, particular powerful metaphors like "Palestine as a woman" still preserve themselves as nativist nostalgia and are maintained to subvert dominant thinking that reinscribes colonial relations. Palestinian women preserved the internal integrity of this nativist nostalgia related to the homeland, collectively defied liberation, firmly wielded the weapons of the struggle contained in their culture, spoke a united language of resistance, and unearthed the colonial cultural matrix by feminizing resistance.

The Palestinian national narrative since the Nakba, as in the three literary forms discussed above—novels (Kanafani), cartoons (al-Ali), and poetry (Darwish)—has developed a collective consciousness among Palestinians in relation to women and resistance. National culture is thus a social product of any group or any nation. An analysis of the narrative of terrorism today or since the 1990s would yield a parallel relationship between resistance and terrorism; the first is legitimate under international law, while the second is not, but still they are lumped together.

As we have elaborated, in the national Palestinian culture Palestinian women represent the fertile homeland, Palestine, and the honoured resistance. In fact, we argue that there is clearly a feminized construction of

resistance. Women are like Acre, which resisted and defeated Napoleon's operation on the Fertile Crescent when it spread from Cairo to al-Sham (Damascus). Most of the resistance literature in the Arab world has circled around the Palestinian cause, as Palestine is the only territory currently under occupation. This emphasizes the significance of Palestinian women even more: Palestine as a woman became the beat and signifier of the Arab *Umma*, or nation, and its aspirations, as well as its ambitions. The literature of resistance is equated with that of Latin America (and with poetry like that of Pablo Neruda); the only difference is in the representation of women. This is clearly why it is very common to find the metaphor of raping the land in relation to the Israeli occupation.

Resistance is not a newcomer to the Arab Islamic world. In the 7th century there appeared four relevant historical forms of resistance: the Mutazalites (who believed in open opposition), the Shi'ites (who believed in empowerment through a secret underground resistance), the Khawarej (who believed in armed resistance), and the Sufists (who believed in negative individual opposition by means of silence and mysticism). "There is a shift in the locus of resistance from external outright military action to internal control of the will ... redefining resistance based on anti-imperial assumptions of post-colonial societies" (Khoury and Dana 2012, 195). Cultural resistance symbolism in Palestinian women has significantly characterized the period since the Nakba. We have argued above that the feminine construction of resistance was produced by blurring the private and public domains and by employing domestic labour as a tool for collective behaviour. The literature on women expresses the hopes of an occupied nation when the woman is the one to plant seeds; expresses the pride of a nation when she always walks with her head up; and reflects the collective consciousness.

The symbolism of Palestine as a woman has constantly been reinvented in artistic forms such as the following two paintings. Figure 4 draws Jerusalem as a woman that has been Judaized; her neck is surrounded with a high separation wall, while her beautiful facial features are being defaced, painted over in the blue of the Israeli flag. Her forehead shows how angry she is, and that tells us she will not let go. Figure 5 is a map of Palestine as a woman by the artist Ibtisam Barakat, who writes on the map, "The map of Palestine the way my grandfather envisioned it: The sun rises in her mouth, spring appears in her eyes, the Mediterranean waves combs her hair, she wears a boat of Jaffa (Yafa) as her earrings, and has a beauty spot on her face because she is from Damascus." Calls to refer to Palestine as "my lady" and graffiti identifying Palestine as a woman are frequent. There is thus no reversal of the national cultural product; in fact, there is only constant revival and preservation of the idea of women's representation in popular culture throughout the occupation years.



FIGURE 4

Caricature of Jerusalem as a woman by Mohammad Sabaaneh

Nowhere in this article have we implied that because Western definitions of gender do not fit the Palestinian non-Western colonial context, Palestinian women do not need to gain equality with men in a patriarchal society. We also think that marginalized women in refugee camps (as well as in Gaza) are represented in the literature we studied because of their high levels of poverty, but the educated middle classes are also represented in other literary works. We chose the most national popular forms of literary work that appeared in early 1960s, which contributed to setting the nativist nostalgia for Palestine as a woman. In 1990, women in refugee camps in the West Bank were active participants in political mobilization through their contributions in home economies and reproduction (Khoury 1990). Palestinian women's agency resists the realities of the refugee camps as exile or *al-manfa*—the margin and the transition zone.

The phenomenon of “feminizing resistance” came about because certain undeclared domestic, individual forms of resistance—Scott's “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1985, 1990)—created a nation of resistance in the newly created exile environment, where marginalized Palestinian women were disconnected from the cultural base of their stolen homeland and reconfigured a pattern not modelled after Western model gender politics. These women confronted the rigid dichotomy of public versus private domains; they de-framed domestic responsibilities; and they de-constrained their re-imagining of feminism within the context of their national oppression.

We believe that the times we are currently experiencing, in which



FIGURE 5

"Map of Historic Palestine" by Ibtisam Barakat

desires are being conscripted, the rich history of historic Palestine is being devalued, and significant concepts (such as resistance) have become inferiorized, particular powerful metaphors, such as Palestine as a woman, came to be preserved as a nativist nostalgia that has been maintained to subvert dominant thinking that re-inscribes colonial relations (see Khoury and Dana 2012). Decolonizing the mind, as Fanon ([1952] 1967) suggested, or relieving the cultural damage inflicted by the colonizer requires a collective defiance by the subaltern, rising above the staged drama before the inferiority of the colonized is epidermalized, as well as

foregrounding the accountability of Palestinian symbols by means of feminizing resistance. The struggle today is over “representation that occurs in language, writing, and other forms of cultural production” (Ashcroft 2001, 2). Palestinian women seized their self-representation by opposing the language of oppression, asserted the language that appeared in the indigenous narrative, and revived the culture of resistance and regained its meaning as part of everyday life.

Representations of women as symbols of Palestine, Beirut, and the resistance by three renowned writers also reflect the status of Palestinian women after the Nakba and helped to shape and constitute women as subjects. Gender in the context of conflict and war allowed Palestinian women to weave their “domestic labour” into resistance practice in everyday life, thereby feminizing resistance. Thus they created a movement, culture and a nation of resistance. This cultural resistance defies the spirit of the colonial mentality and accentuate colonial political regimes of truth. Palestinian women managed to unearth the colonizer’s cultural matrix and, by feminizing resistance and reviving the native nostalgia of viewing Palestine as a beautiful pure woman, constituted a self-conscious voice of dissent. They are reviving the language of resistance, preserving the internal integrity of indigenous culture, and practising cultural resistance *par excellence*.

## Notes

1. Many studies of nationalism and gender were published in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Hasso 1998; Abdulhadi 1998; Gluck 1995; Benhabib 2002; Amireh 2003; Tami 1999). Yuval-Davis (1997) discusses how the gendered national narrative is concerned with constructing and disciplining the bodies of women and identifies the ways in which women are implicated in nationalist objectives (biological, cultural, and symbolic).
2. Events in Palestine began with the 1948 occupation, or Nakba, and continued with the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1965, the 1967 war or *el-Naksa*, Black September 1970 in Jordan, the 1973 war, the 1975 Lebanese war, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the departure of the Palestinian resistance from Lebanon, the national guidance committee in 1982, the first Intifada in 1987, the Oslo Accords in 1993, the advent of the Palestinian Authority in 1995, Hamas winning the election of 2006, the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, the Jenin Refugee Camp massacre in 2002, the victory of Hezbollah in 2006, and the war and genocides in Gaza in 2008–9.

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# Geopolitical Representations: A Textual Analysis of the Turkish Film *VALLEY OF THE WOLVES—PALESTINE*

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*This article focuses primarily on geopolitical representations in the Turkish film Valley of the Wolves—Palestine and on the film's cinematizing of Israel's military actions against Palestinians. Through textual readings of the film, the author highlights three main discussion points by conducting textual readings of the film: (1) reading the film as a counter-geopolitical text that challenges the definition of what are known to be Palestinian and Israeli territories; (2) reading the film as a cinematic text that (re)negotiates Jewish identity and who can be categorized as "good" or "bad" Jews; and (3) reading the film as a political document that attempts to reverse "territorial truth" attached to the imaginative geography of the Promised Land. Reading of selected conversations and action scenes constitutes an important element of the author's analysis of the film.*

*Keywords: Valley of the Wolves—Palestine, counter-geopolitics, geopolitical representations, imaginative geographies, territorial truth*

*Cet article analyse principalement les représentations géopolitiques dans le film turc La vallée des loups – Palestine ainsi que la mise en scène cinématographique des opérations militaires israéliennes menées contre des Palestiniens. À travers une lecture textuelle du film, l'auteur souligne trois éléments de discussion : une lecture textuelle du film comme un texte contre-géopolitique qui conteste les définitions habituelles de ce que l'on considère être les territoires palestiniens et israéliens; ensuite une lecture cinématique du film comme un texte qui renégocie l'identité juive et les catégories des « bons » et des « mauvais » juifs ; enfin, la lecture du film comme un document politique qui tente de retourner la « vérité territoriale » attachée à la géographie imaginée de la Terre promise. L'analyse d'un choix de conversations et de scènes d'action constitue un élément important de l'analyse du film par l'auteur.*

*Mots-clés : La vallées des loups —Palestine, contre-géopolitique, représentations géopolitiques, géographies imaginatives, vérité territoriale*

ISRAELI SOLDIER: Why did you come to Israel?  
POLAT: I did not come to Israel. I came to Palestine.<sup>1</sup>  
—*Valley of the Wolves—Palestine*

## Introduction

Films form an everyday image-based language that can provide better ways of framing a radically changing geopolitical world compared to other forms of geopolitical text such as state-sponsored political documents, speeches, and media outlets (Power and Crampton 2007). Even the most complicated and problematic issues of socio-political life can be expressed smoothly through cinematic narrations and artistic forms; the indisputable ability of films to present events and social subjects in a compelling, and even propagandist, manner charms politicians and world states. Films (and cinema in general), for that reason, have been and continue to be the concern of states, non-state actors, and policy makers. Moreover, by entertaining audiences, they naturally become a mediatic instrument of information for millions. This self-assigned task can often be put to work by a state-aligned entertainment sector to help to create a language parallel to the state's geopolitical visions while securing economic gain. A prime example of such cinematic text is a Turkish political action film, *Valley of the Wolves—Palestine (VWP)*, which undertakes the dual task of entertaining millions and of informing audiences about Turkey's geopolitical visions in the Middle East as it challenges Israel's military practices in Palestine.

In its own way, *VWP* can certainly be situated as a geopolitical text that not only challenges widely understood geopolitical narratives about the Middle East but also conveys and rationalizes Turkey's geopolitical aspirations in the region; in this article, however, I focus mainly on the film's several geopolitical representations. The film, which cinematizes Israel's military actions against Palestine, becomes the main focus of my analysis in three ways: (1) reading the film as a counter-geopolitical text that challenges the definition of what are known to be Palestinian and Israeli territories; (2) reading the film as a cinematic text that (re)negotiates Jewish identity and who can be categorized as "good" or "bad" Jews; and (3) reading the film as a political document that attempts to reverse the "territorial truth" attached to the imaginative geography of the Promised Land. Therefore, selected conversations and readings of action scenes constitute an important element of my analysis of *VWP*. Of course, many other readings are possible.

## Film and Geopolitical Representations

Scholars from various disciplines—such as geography, international area studies, communication, and cultural studies—consider the capacity of popular productions to shape the opinions of millions of people and the way they understand the world (Sharp 1996; Dodds 2006; Power and

Crampton 2007; Dittmer 2010). Scholars in geopolitics concentrate on popular culture's potential to influence identity construction and the geographic imaginations of the masses. Further, they pay special attention to popular culture's ability, whether in films, political cartoons, magazines, books, or other media, to abridge the complexity of social interactions and simplify the disorderliness of world politics into a binary form such as "us against them" or "good versus evil." Popular geopolitics writers argue that popular culture creates abstract and material environments within which familiar social, cultural, and geopolitical meanings shape and are shaped by millions of people who may have never met (Williams 2007; Dittmer and Dodds 2008). Hollywood filmmaking, for example, almost always actively engages in making cultural and geographical representations of the West, and those films that do not represent the West are produced with an Orientalist mindset (Said 1978). In Hollywood films, American values such as individualism, the sanctity of family, love of democracy, fighting for a right cause, and the love of hard work are constantly re-produced and displayed for the interest of the world as the values of other nations are made secondary and "other" (Toal 2007). Especially during the Cold War and after 9/11, Hollywood's involvement in projecting one-sided political, cultural, moral, and geographical views for audiences was celebrated more than in other historical periods (Dittmer 2010). Films such as *Rambo* (1985), *Top Gun* (1986), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Black Hawk Down* (2001), and *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001) successfully brought to consciousness for millions American exceptionalism and its geopolitical responsibilities, paralleling the conjectural policies of current administrations (Toal 2003; Dittmer 2010). Through Hollywood films, America's geopolitical visions and imaginations are effectively and repeatedly coded, presented with little or no emphasis on alternative mappings. *VWP*, produced outside of that Western world, presents itself as one cinematic representation that contests the very fundamentals of geopolitical understandings and geographic projections of the Middle East. From this perspective, the film not only re-visions Turkish geopolitics within the system of contemporary world politics but also renegotiates dominant understandings of territoriality and the cultural politics of a "Promised Land" through its cinematic language and form.

### *Valley of the Wolves—Palestine*

The political action film, *Valley of the Wolves—Palestine* (*VWP*) was released in Turkey and abroad by Pana Film Company in January 2011.<sup>2</sup> Following several popular television series—*Valley of the Wolves (Kurtlar Vadisi)* (2003–2005), *Valley of the Wolves—Terror* (2007), and *Valley of*

*the Wolves—Ambush* (2007–)—the political action films *Valley of the Wolves—Iraq* (2006), *Valley of the Wolves—Gladio* (2009), and now *Valley of the Wolves—Palestine* (2011) have become part of a collection of James Bond-type cinema serials. Pana Film owes its success to the TV series *Valley of the Wolves*, which began broadcasting in January 2003 and has continued under different titles and on different nationwide TV channels (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

*Valley of the Wolves* films and TV series

TV Series	Year	Films	Year
<i>Valley of the Wolves</i>	2003–5	<i>Valley of the Wolves—Iraq</i>	2006
<i>Valley of the Wolves—Terror</i>	2007	<i>Valley of the Wolves—Gladio</i>	2009
<i>Valley of the Wolves—Ambush</i>	2007–	<i>Valley of the Wolves—Palestine</i>	2011

The TV series (*Valley of the Wolves*) and the films familiarized audiences with many values such as honour, duty, bravery, and love of country before any other concepts or messages (Yanık 2009). They similarly dealt with and engaged in domestic and international conspiracy theories and heroic sacrifice, heavily ornamented with nationalism, traditionalism, and justified killing (İlçık 2006; Demir 2007; Yanık 2009; Anaz and Purcell 2010). The producers of *Valley of the Wolves* set their storylines in the day-to-day concerns of Turkish life, such as fighting against the dark organization of the “deep state,” corrupt financial entities, and external enemies’ designs on Turkey and the region (Gültekin 2006). *Valley of the Wolves—Iraq* (*VWI*), for example, brought the Iraq war into cinematic reality by basing its narration on a series of events that allegedly took place in Afghanistan and Iraq from 2001 through 2006.

Although Pana Film considered making another film similar to *VWI* immediately after its release in 2006, the idea failed to take shape until the Israel–Palestine conflict became a critical issue for the ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP). When AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had an acrid conversation with Israeli President Shimon Peres at the 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos, the idea was reconsidered. After Turkey experienced the “height of humiliation” during a diplomatic meeting between the Turkish ambassador, Ahmet Özüçelikkol, and Israel’s deputy foreign minister, Danny Ayalon, in Jerusalem in January 2010 (BBC 2010), *VWP* began to take shape. The subsequent attack by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on the *Mavi Marmara* Gaza Flotilla in May 2010, which resulted in nine deaths and the wounding of 50 Turkish citizens in international waters, gave the needed momentum for this political action film to be realized. The plot of *VWP*, like that of *VWI*, follows well-trained Turkish agents, led by protagonist Polat Alemdar, on a quest

for revenge against the cruel Israeli general Moshe Ben Eliezer, the prime planner and executor of the *Mavi Marmara* raid. The film begins with the IDF's operation aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, a Turkish ship sailing to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza and transport a humanitarian cargo to Palestinians. From the beginning and throughout the film, many shootings and killings occur during Israeli soldiers' raids on Palestinian neighbourhoods and when Polat and his men engage with Israeli soldiers. The film does not refrain even for a moment from depicting IDF soldiers as ultimate killing machines attacking innocent Palestinian civilians.

### ***Valley of the Wolves—Palestine and Territorial Correction***

At the beginning of the film, Polat Alemdar contests the idea of the territoriality of the State of Israel and notions of belonging and non-belonging in Jerusalem.

For his audiences and the apparatus of the Jewish state, Polat reaffirms where Israeli home and homeland begins and ends, through his conversations throughout the film. When the soldier in charge of border control asks Polat what brings him to Israel, he answers by correcting the question: "I did not come to Israel—I came to Palestine" (see Figure 1). With this statement, Polat verifies that Palestine does not belong to Israel and draws our attention to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. In this way Polat engages in territorial correction and geopolitical remapping of Palestinian geography, unequivocally and directly telling the audiences who is the occupier and who is the occupied. Polat's verifications of the geography of occupation echo a statement about Palestinian territo-



FIGURE 1

Polat arrives at an Israeli security checkpoint.

ries by the Turkish president during a talk at Columbia University in New York. In answer to a student's question comparing Turkey's Kurdish population and Palestine, President Abdullah Gül stated,

These two are different. Kurds are the citizens of Turkey. We have been living together for hundreds of years. There are Kurdish people in the Turkish cabinet. We are the equal citizens of the Republic of Turkey. But, Israelis and Palestinians do not come from the same nation. They are not the parts of the same nation. Gaza does not belong to Israel. Palestinian territories do not belong to Israel. The struggle in Turkey and the struggle in the Middle East are not the same (Yeşinsu 2010, 17).

As I read this scene, Polat reaffirms the president's geopolitical presentment as well as engaging in the meaning-making of territorial correction. Short, bold, precise conversations throughout *VWP* continually convey important messages for the audience, confirming a rhetoric that is vibrant in the minds of millions in the Middle East. For example, dinner conversations in the home of the Palestinian character Abdullah reveal important messages about the Palestinian struggle to rebuild their territories and homes:

ABDULLAH: God willing, I am going to build the second floor in a few months.

HIS WIFE: We built this place six times and Israelis demolished it six times and he is still talking about building the second floor. They will demolish it again.

MEMATI [Polat's man]: Brother! You studied engineering, established a business and made enough money in Lebanon. Why did you still want to come back here [Palestine]?

ABDULLAH: Brother! If I leave, he leaves, and they leave, then who is going to stay here? This is our home, homeland.

MEMATI: Some will fight while some earn money to support the fighters.

ABDULLAH: I want to spend my money in my homeland. Freely!

POLAT: Abdullah, if you know that they are going to demolish your home, why do you insist on building it again?

ABDULLAH'S MOTHER: If you give up resisting once, the Israelis will never let any one of us live here again.

It should be noted that *VWP* is deeply concerned with informing viewers that ongoing resistance is the only way to survive in Palestine and to retain Palestinian homeland and territories. Therefore, territoriality, which deals with human activities exercised on space and activities of controlling, defending, excluding, or/and including the demarcated area (Cox 2002), becomes the main concern of the *VWP*. Thus the film not only participates in the defence of Palestinian resistance but also highlights (and frames) discourses that justify why Palestinians belong to the

land and are entitled to control their home and homeland. *VWP* thus acts as a cinematic document conferring the rights and privileges of Palestinians to their land.

Territoriality is an active, contested, practised, and socially constructed process; it is practised every day and everywhere. Thus territoriality is as much about control over/of territory as it is about definitions, identifications, and demarcations. In this sense, *VWP* also contests and redefines territorial definitions—such as *danger*, *fear*, *street*, *home*, and *jurisdiction*—that are associated with everyday life for Palestinians. This becomes evident in the film when alternative representations of Palestinian territories become as important as controlling those territories. For example, conversations between Abdullah's disabled son, Ahmed, and Simone, a Jewish-American tour guide, show audiences what it means to be a Palestinian in Jerusalem and what it means to be a child in the streets of Palestine. These conversations highlight how fear and danger are intertwined in the definition of everyday place and space in Palestine. (These conversations take place in Abdullah's home, where Polat, his men, and Simone take shelter after a fight at a checkpoint.)

SIMONE: I have to go. I will need to go to my consulate [United States] to report what happened today.

POLAT: They are looking for you, too.

SIMONE: Don't worry! I will explain to everyone that you guys are innocent.

POLAT: Outside is dangerous.

SIMONE [*to Abdullah's family*]: Thanks for the hospitality.

AHMED: Don't go outside. They will shoot you.

SIMONE: Why would they shoot me?

AHMED: They shot me.

SIMONE: Why?

GRANDMOTHER: They shot him when he was coming back from his school.

They said there was a curfew. They shot whoever was on the street.

SIMONE: [*After pausing for a moment*] I am really sorry. This violence and cruelty has nothing to do with us. A real Jew does not do this.

Simone leaves the house. The camera follows her closely as she moves nervously through the dark streets of Jerusalem, until gunfire and the screams of Palestinians are heard from the corner at the other end of the street. Everyone runs for their lives. Moshe's men are shooting randomly and trying to maintain order; Palestinian security forces move in to stop them:

PALESTINIAN POLICE: What are you doing here?

MOSHE'S DEPUTY: There are terrorists here. We are here to arrest them.

PALESTINIAN POLICE: This is Palestinian territory, you have no jurisdic-



FIGURE 2

Simone looks around nervously, scanning the streets.

tion. Take your men out of here immediately.

MOSHE'S DEPUTY: We enter any neighbourhood we want.

(*Moshe arrives*)

PALESTINIAN POLICE: This is our territory! You and your soldiers get out of here.

MOSHE: I decide; when, where becomes whose territory.

Moshe reaffirms that he is the law and the Israeli army has jurisdiction to cross any boundary. He kills Palestinian security officers and continues his search for Polat and his men. On the way, he kills more and more Palestinians.

In the following excerpt, *VWP* again engages in territorial correction, demarcating for the audience where Palestinian land begins and ends. Memati, one of Polat's men, has the following conversation with Abdullah as they plan their operation over the map of Palestine and Israel (see Figure 3):

MEMATI: Brother! Tell me, now, where is Palestine and where is Israel?

ABDULLAH: [*pointing the map on the table*] Here is Palestine, and there is Israel.

MEMATI: Sure, brother! But isn't this Palestine an autonomous state? What are Israelis doing here?

ABDULLAH: They only gave the name, not the land.

Here *VWP* reassures viewers that Palestine must exist on the ground, because it certainly exists on the map. By so doing, it takes audiences into the politics of world cartography and suggests that Palestine, too, is an





FIGURE 3  
Abdullah points to the map of Palestine

actual and objective terrain: it can be mapped, and maps are popularly understood as objectively mirroring reality. The scene also reaffirms for viewers that the Palestinian cause is a struggle for survival and human rights, since the land and its people land exist on the map as well as on the ground. What *VWP* attempts to do here is to place Palestinians in their homeland by underlining the absolute locations of a Palestinian state and its people on the ground. By giving the geographic coordinates of a Palestinian state on the map, the film establishes a cartographic discourse in which Palestine and its people become unquestionable, scientific, and the natural elements of cartography.

Through the moving eye of the camera, the film continues to reproduce Palestinian territories. The camera slowly moves around the corners of Abdullah's home. First, it captures children playing, sending a message that these children are future Palestinians and cannot be erased from the Palestinian map. Then it pans through the other corner of the room, capturing photographs of Abdullah's past and the framed deed to the family's property (see Figure 4). In these frames, the film confirms the concreteness of the Palestinian past, the continuation of the present, and the certainty of the Palestinian future. In other words, deliberate motions of the camera in Abdullah's home tell us that Abdullah's past cannot be separated from Palestine's present, nor Palestine's present from Abdullah's past. By gazing through the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the background of the blurred property deed above the photo of Abdullah's family, viewers can understand that this film suggests that we reject the idea of a country without a people, which would make the land empty and available for new settlements. Through the images captured by the camera, the filmmakers



FIGURE 4

The camera captures selected figures hung on the wall of Abdullah's home.

reaffirm that Palestine is not “a land without people for a people without a land” (Said 1992, 9).

Similarly, the key holder shown in Figure 5 remains one of the most important objects captured by the camera in Abdullah's home. The words on the key holder, which is carved in the shape of a key, read “I love you, Palestine.” The key shape symbolizes the story of Palestinians' lost homes under the occupation and communicates to the audience that this story is still alive, with the hope that someday Palestinians will go back to their homes. The image of the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the handle shows that Jerusalem, where the mosque is located, is a place to which every Palestinian possesses the key and thus has a right to enter, regardless of their distance. On the other side of the key is the figure of a child, Handala, who shows his back to us and who belongs to a famous exiled Palestinian cartoonist, Naji Al-Ali. This figure is now the official logo of the Commission for Freedom and Justice through Humor (Najjalali.com 2007). In Al-Ali's words, this child “is barefoot like many children in refugee camps ... an icon ... and his hands behind his back are a symbol of rejection of all the present negative tides in our region” (najjalali.com 2007, 7). The camera does not capture these images (children playing, framed items on the wall, the key holder) at random. Together with other frames, these images establish a framework in which the state of belonging and ownership of the land are reproduced. The message is that every Palestinian has the right to live in and fight for their home/land.

In another scene, *VWP* highlights Palestinians' emotional attachment and visceral connection to their land when Moshe orders Abdullah's home to be demolished on top of his son Ahmed (see Figure 6). As their



FIGURE 5

The Arabic script reads, "I love you, Palestine."

home is being demolished with Ahmed inside, his grandmother pushes through the guards and crawls toward the rubbles, helplessly crying out, "Ahmed! My Ahmed! God is with you. You sleep in peace. Don't worry! Where you lie is the Palestinian soil."

*VWP* continually accentuates this geopolitical discourse: that the fight in Palestine is not only over history (Promised Land) but also over geography (Homeland). The film continuously presents the Palestinian land with memories, attachments, and stories, supporting the struggle against the project of de-Arabizing and Judaizing the Palestinian Territories.

#### *Valley of the Wolves—Palestine and "Good" and "Bad" Jew*

However, *VWP* makes one thing very clear to its audience. According to the filmmakers, there are "bad" Israelis like Moshe (military personnel, corrupt and cruel), and there are "good" Jews like Simone (the Jewish-American tour guide). Without depicting Israel as a place of torture and illegality in sweeping generalizations, the film parallels the genre politics of action/thriller films by representing Israel as a state hijacked by religious fanatics, with Zionist colonialists striving to establish a greater Jewish state that leaves no space for non-Jews. *VWP* makes clear that there are Jewish people who believe in universal human rights, Palestinians' rights to exist, and the coexistence of Jews and Palestinians in Israel. A Jewish-American, Simone, portrays this exceptional figure, while Moshe is classified as one who shows no respect for or tolerance of non-Jews living in Israel. (These conversations take place before Ahmed is killed by Moshe.)



FIGURE 6

A bulldozer demolishes Abdullah's home with his disabled son, Ahmed, inside.

AHMED: Grandma! Simone is scared.

GRANDMOTHER: Why is she scared?

AHMED: Because she is Jewish. She thinks that she will be killed here [in East Jerusalem] because of [her Jewish identity].

GRANDMOTHER: Those who torture us are our enemies, not the Jewish people. No one will or can touch her here.

The certainty and fortitude in Grandmother's voice make Simone put her head down, indicating that she is ashamed to be Jewish or, at least, ashamed of how the Jewish state treats Palestinians. *WVP* makes the point that Israel is the one that ignores the human side of Palestinian geography and history. Indeed, throughout the film, there is no single conversation or scene that implies that Palestinians deny the geographical and historical existence of Israel. This highlights that Israel is as legitimate a state as Palestine is in the region. The film repeatedly makes the point that this land belongs to all occupants, including Palestinians, Israelis, and others; but it often highlights that the idea of a "promised land" is a false ideal and an obstacle to permanent peace in the region. To enforce this geopolitical statement, *WVP* uses the knowledge and wisdom of the Sheikh (the spiritual leader of a Tariqah):

SHEIKH: I have been thinking for a long time about why these people [Israelis] are torturing Palestinians. I have realized that their fear has forestalled their rationality and conscience. They have gotten in a condition wherein they count all non-Jews as the enemy of Jewish people. Islam is a religion of peace. On the land where we live today, the Jews, Christians and Muslims have all lived in harmony for centuries.

*VWP* continues to question Jewish identity. Parallel to the binary thinking through which peoples, places, and cultures are identified opposite of each other, this film reproduces Jewishness in two forms: a good Jew and a bad Jew. Thus, the ideal Jerusalem should resemble that of Saladin's time, when Christians, Muslims, and Jews lived in harmony under the reign of an Islamic Kingdom. The film frames the bad Jews as those who immigrated from Europe and elsewhere to establish the Greater Israeli Kingdom, which ideally stretches from the Mesopotamian Valley to the Sinai Desert, at the expense of other nations and peoples and at any cost. And what makes these bad Jews bad is that they exclude everyone except those who believe that the world will fall under the rule of this new Great Israel, as described in the Bible. Dialogues between Simone and Moshe reveal this detail.

SIMONE: I witnessed all the crimes that you committed. You will explain them in court. I am going to watch you as long as I live. You must know that half of my family are lawyers.

MOSHE: Your parents should be ashamed that they have a daughter like you.

SIMONE: You embarrass all Jewish people. The Torah says "do not kill."

MOSHE: Wrong! It says "do not kill Jews."

SIMONE: I don't want to discuss Judaism with you. You are not a Jew.

MOSHE: You are an idiot who doesn't know how this country is established. You don't deserve to live, but you are a registered Jew, so one Jew is one Jew. [*To guards*] Take her away so that she can learn Jewishness.

With this sort of dialogues, *VWP* intends to uncover the presumed characteristics of current Israeli sentiments and some of the main intentions that are hidden from people through the use of a Jewish American citizen, Simone Levy. The film repeatedly makes this Jewish-American person speak as an insider/outsider who is able to witness the story from both sides. Through her conversations, *VWP* attempts to redefine the "State of Israel," which can be understood as a political unit and a democratic country in which all citizens are equal, as opposed to the "Jewish state," which refers to a certain ethnicity and religion. Thus, Simone's job as an insider/Jew is to convince viewers that not all Israelis are like Moshe. But she is not very successful in completing her task:

SIMONE: Mister Administrator, you cannot hold me here [in prison]. I am an American citizen. Please let my embassy come and get me out of here. If I am going to be tried, I want to be tried in my country.

ADMINISTRATOR: This is your country. Your last name is Levy. Don't you know what this noble name means?

SIMONE: I am not going to learn the history of my parents from you. If you know my last name, then you should know who I am, too.

ADMINISTRATOR: I know who your parents are very well. [*Pointing to a book*] Open to page 216. There, it is written what your grandfather went through in Poland, and it tells in what conditions he sent your father and mother to the United States.

SIMONE: My grandfather did not die so that you could kill people easily here. My grandfather was killed by murderers like you. Have you found any single Jew who was killed by an Arab in Poland?

ADMINISTRATOR: It was never easy to find a home for homeless Jews. Arabs don't want us here; here on our soil—the Promised Land.

SIMONE: It is a lie. Yes, before no one was recognizing Israel, but now everyone recognizes Israel. Those who live here are suffering only because of your actions.

ADMINISTRATOR: And they will suffer more. Even rats learn where to go and where not to go by suffering. Only animals learn by suffering.

The lines between the good and the bad are clearly drawn in the dialogue of this film. Conversations also do not last long; they are short, precise, simple, and memorable for the purpose of delivering their message to audiences.

### ***Valley of the Wolves—Palestine and Territorial Truth***

*VWP* not only makes territorial corrections and redefines Jewish identity but also (re)negotiates and challenges the concept of “territorial truth,” which tends to operate within the realm of imagined geographies of the Promised Land. As Quiquix and Curti (2011) point out, Israel repeatedly engages in methods of producing “territorial truth” by applying imagined geographies of Israel to establish territorial legitimacy, formulated within the rhetoric of the “Promised Land.” In this sense, the Promised Land corresponds not only to the given geographic locations, which stretch beyond the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan Valley, but also accentuates the divine pledging of the land to the descendants of Jacob. Imagined geographies are by no means fictional or fabricated; as Said (1978) highlights, they are never the products of purely cognitive operations. Rather, they are concrete, substantial, and, indeed, real (Al-Mahfedi 2011). For Al-Mahfedi (2011, 22), imaginative geography is in effect as “a precondition for the politics of territorial conquest.” Along the same lines and referencing Nadia Abu El-Haj, Quiquix and Curti (2011, 42) note Israel’s “obsession with uncovering Jewish archeological artifacts as a practice through which national identity—and national rights—have long been asserted.” Citing Meron Benvenisti’s study of early Zionist cartography, and its production of “white patches” on the mental maps of Jewish immigrants in Palestine, Quiquix and Curti argue that Israel often engages the politics of place-making by registering

material and imagined productions over occupied Palestinian territories. In Al-Mahfedi's words, "such conquests of territory begin with the practice of inventing new meanings about territory and re-imagining systems of sovereignty on the landscape" (2011, 23). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for example, similarly alluded to re-imagining systems of sovereignty on the landscape during his speech at the United Nations in 2011. His speech reaffirmed the Jewishness of the Israeli state and its people's right to exist, right to control, and right to dispose of the holy land, accentuating ancientness of Jewish aspiration to and registration over the Promised Land:

In my office in Jerusalem, there's an ancient seal. It's a signet ring of a Jewish official from the time of the Bible. The seal was found right next to the Western Wall, and it dates back 2,700 years, to the time of King Hezekiah. Now, there's a name of the Jewish official inscribed on the ring in Hebrew. His name was Netanyahu. That's my last name. My first name, Benjamin, dates back a thousand years earlier to Benjamin—Binyamin—the son of Jacob, who was also known as Israel. Jacob and his 12 sons roamed these same hills of Judea and Samaria 4,000 years ago, and there's been a continuous Jewish presence in the land ever since.

And for those Jews who were exiled from our land, they never stopped dreaming of coming back: Jews in Spain, on the eve of their expulsion; Jews in the Ukraine, fleeing the pogroms; Jews fighting the Warsaw Ghetto, as the Nazis were circling around it. They never stopped praying, they never stopped yearning. They whispered: Next year in Jerusalem. Next year in the promised land.

As the prime minister of Israel, I speak for a hundred generations of Jews who were dispersed throughout the lands, who suffered every evil under the Sun, but who never gave up hope of restoring their national life in the one and only Jewish state (Netanyahu 2011).

Netanyahu's words surely confirm again the authenticity of the territorial claim and the concreteness of the imagined geography of the Promised Land, which helps to legitimize the idea of "territorial truth." His talk also indicates that Israeli authorities and geographers not only engage in the politics of place-making (rewriting geography) in Palestine but also treat Palestinian land as empty land that has been awaiting Israeli occupation and ownership for centuries. Unless this Promised Land is fully Judaized, it will stay orphaned and unprotected. As Said (2007) notes, this narrative is a struggle over Palestinian (in)visibility—or, in the words of Dabashi (2007, 10), "at the core of the Palestinian historical presence is ... a geographical absence." Here *VWP* questions the Jewishness of the land and contests the idea of Jewish registration of

Palestinian land as the Promised Land by articulating a new form of narrative and territoriality. It questions the legitimacy of the idea of occupied land and the neutrality of Jewish settlements in the Palestinian Territories. For example, when Polat Alemdar is reminded that he could not make it out of the Promised Land, he replies: “I don’t know what part of this land has been promised to you, but I promise you six feet under.” Similarly, *VWP* frequently states that Israeli-occupied land is a contested and unregistered place in the eyes of international community and underlines the politics of dispossession. Therefore, this film can be read as a cinematic attempt to remake and (re)document where the Palestinian and Israeli people belong. In other words, *VWP* is a geopolitical manifesto to reshape what is popularly known as Palestinian and Israeli home-land. As both Campbell (2003) and Yanık (2009) argue, this film successfully reproduces material and imaginative representations of border, threat, and danger. In this framework, *VWP*, as a private-sector cultural and commercial enterprise, reconstructs symbolic representations of the Palestinian borders and commits to deciphering Israeli geopolitics by making territorial truth. It contests the very idea of the completeness of the State of Israel and its rhetoric of the Promised Land, and thus it challenges popular geopolitical imaginations of Palestine–Israel borders and underlines the arbitrariness of the Promised Land and of Israel’s geographical registrations over the Palestinian homeland. To borrow the words of Massad (2007), the filmmakers have succeeded, in part, in deploying and instrumentalizing *VWP* as a weapon of resistance in the international arena and slowly infiltrating this bastion of Zionist power.

### Concluding Remarks

As Yanık (2009) highlights, the controversy about *VWP* is long over, but its imprints on Turkish cinema and popular culture make it worth writing about. To date, not many Turkish popular cinema and television productions outside the *Valley of the Wolves* franchise have overtly emphasized geopolitical topics or heavily adopted nationalist elements in their narratives. Few other Turkish films have used popular culture to set geopolitical agendas that problematize the regional geopolitical order in the Middle East, and not many other political action films produced in Turkey have adopted regional geopolitics into their stories successfully to simplify geopolitical understandings of the Middle East for their audiences. In this sense, *VWP* is one of the most interesting pieces of popular culture used both as an entertainment apparatus and as a political document that re-registers Palestinian land to Palestinians. But this is not all it aims to accomplish. As a political action film, *VWP* also helps “Turks envision themselves, their country’s and other countries’ place in the new



global (dis)order” (Yanik 2009, 167), a dimension that should be explored in further studies. In this study, I have tried to provide a reading of the geopolitical meanings and representations squeezed between the lines of conversations and between the frames of filmic action in *VWP*.

### Note

1. All English translations of film dialogue are my own.
2. According to the Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>), the film was also released in the United States, England, Italy, Iran, France, Germany, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, China, Denmark, Armenia, South Korea, Croatia, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Japan, Canada, Cyprus (Greek), Cyprus (Turkish), Hungary, Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine, and Greece.

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# Border Crossing Between Iraq and Iran, Summer 1953

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*Historians have begun to abandon the nation-state frame of reference and to recognize the significance of borderlands and border crossing for electoral politics; master narratives such as self and other, domestic and foreign, nationalist and internationalist, have been redirected to new forms of transnational identity. The present article follows this lead by asserting that border crossings between Iran and Iraq were never simply the sum total of transits by heads of state; indeed, such journeys framed political possibilities within Iraq. During the summer of 1953, the Zahedi coup in Tehran initiated a series of strikes over the border that challenged the newly crowned Hashemite King Faisal II in Iraq, as well as his administration's vision of a petroleum-based modernity for the country's working classes. To advance this position, the author identifies and explicates three different forms of border-crossing: the cross-border transits of heads of state are contrasted with those of conscripted soldiers, elderly pilgrims, and middle-class families and the domestic workers they employed. It becomes clear that the Iraqi left's political imaginary also enjoyed a solid base in the neighbouring jurisdiction.*

*Keywords: coup, domestic workers, labour, migration, pilgrimages, strike, Iraq, Iran*

*Les historiens ont commencé à se détourner du cadre de référence de l'État-nation pour reconnaître l'importance des espaces frontaliers et de leur traversée pour la vie politique électorale. Des grands récits sur le Soi et de l'Autre, le domestique et l'étranger, le nationaliste et l'internationaliste, ont été instrumentalisés pour définir de nouvelles formes d'identité transnationale. Cet article affirme que la question de la traversée de la frontière entre l'Irak et l'Iran ne se réduit pas à une simple comptabilité des mouvements effectués par les chefs d'État, bien qu'ils influençaient les opportunités politiques en Irak. Durant l'été de 1953, le coup d'État de Zahedi à Téhéran a incité des Irakiens à lancer des grèves contre le roi hachémite Fayçal II et contre la vision que son gouvernement propageait d'une modernité basée sur le pétrole. L'auteur identifie et analyse trois formes de traversée de la frontière : le passage des chefs d'État est comparé à celui des conscrits, des pèlerins d'un certain âge, des familles des classes moyennes et de leurs employés de maison. Il apparaît alors que l'imaginaire politique de la Gauche irakienne était largement partagé par la région limitrophe.*

*Mots-clés : coup d'État, employés de maison, travail, migration, pèlerinages, Irak, Iran*

### Literature Review

While human geographers long monopolized the study of citizens' transits across the borders that divide modern nation-states, historians have begun to take account of communities' movements through space. Furthermore, the emergence of "border studies" as a field of inquiry has united scholars working in geography with those from anthropology, economics, political science, and sociology. The foundation of an Association for Borderlands Studies accompanied the establishment of a number of university programs (including those at Arizona State University, Earlham College, Lake Forest College, and New Mexico State University in the United States) that offer courses and support theses centred on frontiers. Newly published documents such as those of Schofield (1989) suggest that the boundary between Arab Iraq and neighbouring Iran can be conceptualized as the result of a historical process (rather than a historical fact), and projects such as those of Maktabi (1999), Thompson (2000), Kern (2001), Simon (2002), Mojtahed-Zadeh (2007), El-Azhary (2012), and Ates (2013) are benefitting (even if indirectly) from these developments.

Our story begins with the most prominent individuals, and the ways in which public figures transited the boundaries between the countries they led.

#### Border Crossings by Heads of State

Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey were joined in the Saadabad Pact of friendship and nonaggression from 1937; while Afghanistan shares no boundaries with the other states, Iran shares frontiers with both Iraq and Turkey. Marashi (2012) draws attention to border crossings by these countries' heads of state, as when Iranian Reza Shāh Pahlavī's motorcade crossed into Turkey at a designated point along the Maku–Erzerum road. A triumphal arch adorned with flags marked their common border; when the Shāh arrived, two honour guards representing the national militaries of the two states played national anthems. Such a border-crossing ceremony, Marashi writes, "suggests how important the public marking of political boundaries had become for each state" (2012, 1929). The grandiose trappings—honour guard, motorcade, and triumphal arch—underscore the rarefied nature of such transits.

Another example demonstrates how exceptional it was for members of the Pahlavī family to enter other states, and opens Marashi's discussion to Iran's neighbour. One Sunday morning, Iran's Royal Guard attempted to arrest the Mossadiq government in Tehran. When this failed, Mohammad Reza Pahlavī and his young wife fled the country. In

Baghdad, the *Iraq Times* reported that the Shāh and Queen Soraya “arrived unexpectedly” in a twin-engine De Havilland plane, landing unannounced at Baghdad airport just as the Iraqi cabinet was assembling to await King Feisal’s scheduled return from Amman. The unanticipated visitors, with their two small suitcases, were whisked away to the Qasr al-Abiad guesthouse (“Shah comes,” 1953). As police secured their plane that afternoon, King Feisal greeted them informally at his uncle’s home, the Qasr ar-Rihab (“Shah at tea,” 1953).

The question of how long Mohammad Reẓā and his wife would stay in Iraq took on urgent diplomatic importance. A customs officer at the airport told the *Iraq Times* that the Pahlavī monarch planned to stay “a few days.” As the two visitors left by car for Kerbala, the U.S. Embassy quietly cabled Washington for instructions. Iraq’s acting foreign minister told an American diplomat that “he felt that the Shah should not stay out of the country longer than a week or so”; publicly, Iran’s *chargé d’affaires* in Baghdad had warned the host government to “see that nothing is done regarding the Shah’s presence that might damage future relations between the two nations” (USNA, RG 84, box 40, folder 350). Suitably intimidated, Iraq’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs hustled Mohammad Reẓā and Soraya Bakhtiari onto a commercial flight to Rome the following morning (USNA, RG 84, box 40, folder 350). Both Reẓā Shāh Pahlavī’s triumphant journey to Turkey and Mohammad Reẓā’s disorganized retreat to Iraq differed from the voyages of ordinary citizens.

### **The Border Crossings of Military Conscripts and Diplomats**

Iran’s modern rulers (both father and son) had crossed borders either with a highly disciplined personal guard or with no any official attendants at all; both state and informal visits were carefully scripted so as to minimize, if not eliminate, threats to the security of local populations. As we shall see, such ceremonial displays of civility contrast with more conventional exhibitions of violence on both sides of the border; while national anthems preoccupied leaders, conscripts sought to augment their rations. A number of incidents preceded Mohammad Reẓā’s impromptu flight to Baghdad. First, three Iranian soldiers were arrested over the border; then the local authorities returned the intruders to Iran “in the interest of the friendly relations existing between the two countries” (“Iraq Protests,” 1953). As Baghdad Radio’s deputy director acknowledged (“armed Iranian soldiers have begun to infiltrate Iraqi territory and to commit outrages on the inhabitants of peaceful villages,” stealing cattle “and anything else they can lay their hands on”), incursions on Iraqi sovereignty disturbed the peace (“Iranian Raids,” 1953).

Shortly thereafter, armed civilians accompanied 20 Iranian soldiers

across the border into Iraqi Kurdistan; these motley elements stole 615 head of sheep belonging to the Jaf tribe in the village of Lale Deh, wounding several shepherds (“Iranian Press,” 1953). A week later, a third group crossed 5 km into the Benawa Suta area, where “they attempted to loot the sheep of the village” (“Iranian Raids,” 1953). “Some casualties occurred” as shepherds and police sought to protect local property, and “eight Iranian soldiers, including the outpost commander, were captured on Iraqi soil and taken to Penjwin,” a spokesman added (“Iraq Protests,” 1953).

The Hashemite monarchy congratulated itself on their restraint. For its part, Iraq “was judicious in avoiding a deterioration in its relations” with the larger and more populous state on its border. Ultimate responsibility was laid at the door of Tehran’s newspaper editors, who (unlike their counterparts in Baghdad) reflected a variety of opinions. Iraq’s director general of propaganda blamed editors over the border for a “hostile campaign undertaken by certain Iranian newspapers against the Arabs; Iraq in particular” (“Iraq Protests,” 1953). Acknowledging the distance between governors and governed in the Saadabad countries, Iraq’s official spokesman distanced the nationalist position available in print from the alleged preferences of a more conservative public: “Press attacks do not always reflect the true feelings of a country” (“Iranian Press,” 1953).

The Saadabad Pact gave rise to obfuscating heads of state, thieving soldiers, wary shepherds, and—finally—posturing diplomats. The summer Mohammad Reẓā and his wife landed at Baghdad airport, allegations circulated that foreigners were using Iraqi territory to undermine Iran’s elected representatives (“Iraq Reprimanded,” 1953). As Mohammad Mossadeq fought to defend the prime minister’s prerogatives, British military intelligence broadcast radio programs over the border (“Anti Mossadeq Agent,” 1953); the Iranian government protested “the flight of British planes” over their sovereign territory (“Iraq Denies,” 1953).

When Premier Mussadeq expelled the United Kingdom’s entire diplomatic staff, a “cavalcade of 27 cars ... set out on the road to Baghdad,” carrying the British Embassy’s secret files (Kimche 1950, 362). From allegations that the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq had sheltered those seeking to undermine the constitutional order in Iran, Baghdad Radio sought refuge in rhetoric: “Since no planes of any nationality have flown over the Iranian territory or the Iraqi-Iranian border and since the Iraqi embassy in Tehran has received no protest in this connection, the report should therefore be considered as biased and unfounded” (“Report of Protest,” 1953). Iraq’s director of propaganda assumed that the citizens of neighbouring Iran embraced more conservative positions than those of newspaper editors.

### **Border Crossings by Ordinary Citizens**

Petroleum was in the process of creating a community of politically aware persons on both sides of the Iran–Iraq border. After World War II, citizens of Iran and Iraq came to share a common economy, giving rise to comparable political goals. This common economy was based on a foundation laid before the war. The Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC) and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) prospected together for a long time, but differences persisted: Tehran’s petroleum economy was six times as large as that of its neighbour, and the AIOC was among the owners of the IPC. Also, since the AIOC built refineries before the IPC, more jobs were available in Iran than in Iraq (Shwadran 1955, 278).

Two demographic groups in Iraq crossed into Iran on a regular basis during the first decade of the Cold War. In recognition of what Tavakoli-Targhi (2001, x) has called “homeless texts,” the records of such visits can only be pieced together from multiple archives that collectively yield a “hybridization of cultures and the invention of national selves.” Language proved no insurmountable barrier during the first decade after the Second World War; as activist Fahima Sadiq told a journalist, because many Iraqis spoke the Iranian language or understood it, she was able to strike up conversations with people around her (Sadik 1959). As we shall see, two constituencies incorporated cross-border wanderings into their life strategies: older members of the Shi’a community, and middle-class families (and their servants) from Basra.

Older Shi’a Muslims were accustomed to make pilgrimage to northern Iran, where they visited the mausoleum of Sultan Mohammad Taher and the shrine of Qassem ibn-Musa Kazim. Most of these men travelled without government documents, so they would engage a river canoe (*bellum*) and cross the Kur River at Meshed, also known as Mansurabad. In this way, the pilgrims could enter Iran at night with as little fanfare as possible. Once safely landed on the eastern shore, they would thumb a ride and eventually catch the bus to Tehran and points north. The American consul in Basra reported that “the total cost of the Basra-Roda [Roodbar Kola] round trip is about 12 Iraqi dinars” (at the time, one Iraq dinar equalled approximately US\$2.80, for a total cost of US\$33.60). If border guards on either the Iraqi or the Iranian side detained an undocumented traveller, “the matter is fixed on the spot with a bribe amounting to roughly half a dinar” (USNA, RG 84, box 40, folder 350). The border town’s population doubled during the first post-war decade (Sumner 1989, 634), mutely attesting to the number of such travellers.

Similarly, middle-class Iraqis were accustomed to vacationing *en famille*. In general, middle-class Iraqis preferred to spend their summer

vacations in cooler climates; the royal family travelled every summer to Kurdistan (where they had built a villa in 1953) or the Côte d'Azur; political leaders travelled to Europe, and civil servants to Lebanon (BE, *Records of Iraq*, XI, pp. 102–3). Basra port employees and those who worked for petroleum companies preferred a change in the cost of living to a change in climate, which they could achieve by crossing the border into Iran—where, following the nationalization of the AIOC, the local currency was falling (Groseclose 1952). The national airline offered an excursion fare of 25 dinar to Tehran, round-trip (“Iraqi Airways,” 1953). During the hottest days of June and July, “large numbers of middle class Basra families are spending their vacations in and around Tehran, instead of going to Lebanon,” where the currency (pegged to sterling) had remained stable.

Some of these families travelled with children and domestic servants. The U.S. consul to Iraq’s southern port reported that “as many as thirty families have left ... to Khormanshahr by automobile and from there by train to Tehran,” accompanied by maids and nannies (USNA, RG 84, box 40, folder 350). Women employed as domestic servants were a significant constituency for Iraq’s communist party, whose underground publishing house, Dar al-Hikma, had translated Engels’ *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (Bashkin 2009, 75), with its assertion that women’s oppression was the result of class society and the nuclear family. That summer, Iraq’s government was acquitting Fatima Amin Ahmad for lack of evidence of her political activity, justifying her presence in the communists’ safe house because she “was merely acting as a housekeeper to the others” (“Communists Sentenced,” 1953). At the time, the communist party’s dues-paying members were concentrated in the south and in the capital; of 415 nationwide, only 48 resided in Basra (Alexander 2008, 262).

Older Shi’a men, petroleum clerks and their wives, domestic servants—all related political news they had heard over the border. Thanks to the travel of these three groups, rumours spread in Iraq that the military in neighbouring Iran would establish a dictatorship similar to that prevailing in Syria; “with regard to Mossadegh they quote an old Arab proverb, ‘Mossadegh holds the strings but the ball of twine is not in his hands’” (USNA, RG 84, box 40, folder 350). In this way, Iraq’s southern port city received news of Fazlollah Zahedi’s role in a counter coup of 19 August 1953 even before the Shah and his wife landed in the capital.

### **Iraq’s First Refinery Promises Iraqis Coveted “Modern” Jobs**

Brought by pilgrims, vacationers, and their domestic servants, word of another model circulated in Iraq. Over the border at Abadan, the AIOC’s “company town” provided workers with housing and transport; in addi-



tion, medical care was available for dependents at no charge. Such benefits were not equally available to labourers and managers alike, as long as foreigners made policy decisions at the Abadan facility. While at the time of the AIOC's nationalization no facility on the Iraqi side of the border compared with Abadan, the legal structure was in place for a larger government role. Through law no. 11 of 1951, Iraq ratified the International Labour Organization's employment service convention of 1948, no. 88, providing for the organization of national employment offices (Badre 1959, 32–33).

In Iraq, wage payments consisted of a base salary (whether according to contract, monthly, or daily rates) and a number of additional allowances. At the lowest classification of day wages (0.45 Iraqi dinar), a worker was eligible for merit awards (of an additional 0.02 dinar); however, the number of merit awards was capped at 2. In addition to merit awards, employees were eligible for "cost of living," "pipeline location," "drilling location," "dirty work," and "shift" allowances. Finally, an allowance was payable to employees required to travel on duty away from their normal base and away from areas in which company housing and/or cafeterias were available (Badre 1959, 57–59). In addition to wages, petroleum companies provided housing according to citizenship and seniority: "As part of the expatriate employment contract, the companies provided not only houses at or near the work sites, but also made available the complete furnishings and household utensils, with full maintenance for the houses, gardens, and all attached facilities." Fences, sentries, and guards separated foreigners' housing compounds from accommodations for employees paid by the month or day lived (Badre 1959, 79–80).

In Basra, new housing was already being built for workers at "Zubair City" (Lenczowski 1960, 187). This development was tied to the decision to expand company operations in the Rumaila sector, two hours from Basra by car. The company had chosen an "integration" policy (increasing its dependence on local businesses), as opposed to providing directly for workers' housing, transport, and medical needs, as the AIOC did over the border at Abadan (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). Foreign journalists reported a general impression that the petroleum company would provide public medical services. "Word passed through the local villages that I.P.C. policy was to give medical treatment to the natives, even if they weren't"; an IPC dentist "found himself confronted at a pipeline station with a queue of 150 Bedouin tribesman demanding treatment" (Faltermayer and Linge 1958).

Near the Iraqi capital, the country's first refinery was scheduled to open. Named after the village in which it is located, on the left bank of the Tigris downstream and 20 km southwest of Baghdad, Daurah promised Iraqis "modern" jobs with full benefits, comparable to those at Abadan.

Already workers were laying railway lines to the site of the new refinery and putting in place a 135-mile 12-inch pipeline to supply crude oil. Iraqis were poorly remunerated for the “unskilled” jobs of laying railway lines and fitting pipeline, and these short-term jobs would end when construction was complete. Scheduled to begin operations within two years, Daurah would have a production capacity of 250 000 tons a year, which would make it the largest single industrial plant in the country (“King Addresses,” 1954). Iraq’s opposition parties seized on the prospect of “skilled” jobs at the refinery to transform the country’s economy. Article 31 of Iraq’s labour law no. 72 for 1936 had authorized the government to regulate public employment, and public employment offices had opened in all the country’s major cities in 1946. While the state placed no obligations on employers to recruit workers through these offices, and while job seekers’ participation was strictly voluntary, recruitment committees (composed of four employers’ and four workers’ representatives) advised the director of the Department of Labour.

### **A Wave of Strikes Erupts Across the Country**

Having established that Iraqis of all walks of life—the middle class, elderly Shi‘a, male and female political radicals—travelled to Iran regularly, and having identified the new refinery at Daurah as a model for the preferred kind of work, we can now discuss the Basra Petroleum Company (BPC) strikes. Iraq’s legally registered opposition and political left looked over the border to Iran. Abadan may have served Iraq’s internationalists as a helpful model while they built union organizations among employees of the BPC in the south of their own country. The U.S. vice consul in Basra, Charles L. Widney, Jr., was a close observer:

[I have] spoken to a number of people within the company who have had close association with the workers and others described. I have mingled among demonstrators and heard part of the speeches and recognized some of the speakers. I have discussed the personalities involved discreetly but at length with lawyers and others not associated either with the government or the Company (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2).

In December 1953, with the support of their family members, men walked off their jobs as bus drivers for Basra municipality; dockworkers, dredgers, and radio operators followed them. Widney recounted that the news of plans for a strike circulated through areas of the city where women bought and sold daily provisions: “In every instance the pattern has been the same. Rumours are heard in the local market (*suk*) that a strike is going to take place in such and such a place, and on such and such a day. Nothing happens on that day but several days later the strike

occurs” (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). Even though the radio operators’ strike was broken within a few hours, BPC employees followed others’ example.

For BPC employees, a company decision to transfer number of workers and their immediate dependents from the city to new homes in Zubair City set off the strike. The company’s provision of housing for a few families threatened the extended support networks that offered workers a form of collective security. “About twelve of these families complained about this move [against their will]. They wished to continue to live in Basra [among their extended families] and to be transported at the Company’s expense to the oil field daily.” Once they moved to the housing development, Zubair City’s workers would lose their transportation allowances. “About forty of these workers wanted the Company to let them keep the allowances and provide transportation on company-owned and -operated buses” (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2)

Widney was under the impression that while local labour organizers were disorganized, they were supported by national labour leaders in Baghdad and by the opposition National Democratic Party (al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati, NDP) supported them, and they even received help from the Tudeh Party over the border. Local authorities believed that the strikers’ first leaflet had been printed in Abadan because it reached Basra so quickly (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). The U.S. consul was confident that—without any assistance from Iran—members of Iraq’s own opposition, the NDP, made the Basra strikes possible: “The strike was directed from the headquarters of this party in Basra with its official newspaper *Wida’ al-Ahali* appealing daily for public support of the movement” (“Turmoil,” 1953), and it was led by Kamil al-Jaderji, “one of Iraq’s ablest politicians and richest landlords” (Kimche 1950, 96).

While they enjoyed the support of established political parties, the strike leaders themselves were of lower-middle-class background. Strike committee chair Jamil Mirjan Rehani was a secondary school graduate. In his early twenties, he worked as laboratory assistant in the Petrology and Engineering Department; it was he who “did most of the talking to the assembled crowds” (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). A driver, Jabbar Hamudi Sabir, was also on the committee; while Sabir had no particular affiliation with any registered political party, “his speeches and talks as a negotiator with the company officials and local authorities reflected the communist line.” Other organizers included clerk Abdul Amir al-Shawi, engine attendant Jabbar Hadi, and mechanic Abdul Kadhim Mustafa (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2).

Mohammed Rashid, a Basra attorney in his late twenties, edited *Wida’ al-Ahali*; a second contributor was another local lawyer, Mohammad Amin al-Aradi. As the NDP’s principles of “democratic

socialism” recognized private ownership, limited free enterprise, the nationalization of industry, and state ownership of essential utilities (Khadduri 1973, 138), the party served as political home to a large number of the urban bourgeoisie, including left-to-centre intellectuals, students, and professionals. While Rashid and Aradi worked together to plan the petroleum workers’ strike, they differed in their ideological orientation: “al-Rashid’s articles unequivocally echoed the Communist line faithfully while al-Aradi’s was strictly ultra-nationalistic and anti-British” (Haj 1997, 87).

Political party membership within the larger strike committee was equally diverse. Rehani “belong[ed] to a well-known middle class Basra family long connected with senior statesman Salih Jabr’s Umma Socialist party,” and the party secretary in Basra confirmed his affiliation. As historian Hanna Batatu (1983, 466) points out, the party’s name was misleading: “one-time Prime Minister Salih Jabr christened his party, which was anchored on landowners and semi feudal tribal sheikhs, the ‘Socialist Party of the Nation’: he was only one of the many who in that decade wrapped themselves with the cloak of socialism in the hope of borrowing a little of its popularity.” However, there is no independent evidence that Jabr’s Umma party helped organize the Basra strikes (USNA, RG 84, box 45, Folder 560.2).

### **The Strikers’ Widening Demands**

Initially seeking only to remain in their homes and continue to receive their transportation allowances, strikers broadened their goals and demanded administrative equality for the workers. They wanted a single personnel policy to cover all jobs—goals similar to those already achieved by activists over the border in Abadan. The Basra strikers demanded that BPC cease procuring services from subcontractors who paid less than BPC did; they insisted on free medical services for all workers and their dependents, with the additional promise that any worker who recovered from illness would be returned to full employment (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). Interpreted more broadly, the strikes were part of oil workers’ agitation for better pay and conditions (Tripp 2002, 135); for Podeh (2011, 133), the oil workers’ strike marked the beginning of the Ba’ath party’s long struggle to prominence.

The Basra strikers demanded that the category of “temporary employees” be eliminated, so that all workers (including watchmen) would have permanent jobs and be entitled to all rights guaranteed by the Amended Workers’ Law no. 72 of 1936. All company employees would then receive transport, free meals, and medical care for themselves and their dependents, be paid for their annual leave in cash, and be free to live

in housing of their choice (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). Again, such demands suggest that these workers had embraced goals similar to the policies already in place at the AIOC's Abadan facility.

Finally, the strikers had explicitly political demands. They sought payment of wages forfeited during the 1951 strike, the re-hiring of all workers fired for trade-union activity during that labour action, and legal recognition for their own association, a Union of the Oil Workers of Basra (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). While the International Labour Organization had sponsored Convention 87, guaranteeing the freedom of association, in 1948, Iraq had not ratified it; at the time, organizations such as trade unions and political parties were required to register with the Ministry of the Interior in order to establish a legal identity for the purpose of opening bank accounts and securing space for meetings (as when the NDP's middle-class members met in the Stars [*al-Nujum*] cinema; "31 Acquitted," 1954).

At first, it seemed the strike would be resolved easily and peacefully, since "an atmosphere of good humour prevailed throughout the city and among the strikers" (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). The BPC had already agreed to apply the labour law to those employed in messes and kitchens and to all monthly-rate employees (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). Convening early in the morning, and lasting until just before sundown, Rehani's "speech-making was strictly communist with the usual key phrases of 'Anglo-American imperialist,' 'Anglo-American criminals and warmongers,' 'colonizing and exploiting imperialists'" (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). Shop owners in the bazaar and neighbourhood stores extended credit to strikers' families; members of extended families aided others, and contractors even advanced wages to their employees who had decided to participate in the walkout. Picketers took breaks for lunch, and permitted foreign employees to cross their lines unmolested throughout the first day (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2).

Having read strikers' demands published in the daily newspaper, a British BPC employee encountered a group of strikers in the oil field; he alleged that they attempted to disrupt the activities of some non-striking contract workers. One shot was fired. Provoked, the strikers attacked him and seized his weapon. Accounts of the shooting also facilitated communists' entry into what had previously been an NDP-dominated strike (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). After the shooting, Abbas Abdul Muttalib al-Mudhaffar was caught with a flyer titled "Announcement by the Local Committee of the Communist Party of Iraq in Basra"; he also had a copy of a pamphlet titled "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Fiftieth Anniversary" ("Basra Court," 1954).

The minister of the interior arrived in Basra, immediately calling for

a round of discussions. Afterward, he claimed that a delegation of workers had “disclosed to me the real situation in the strike and the motives for it” (“Basra Strike,” 1953). Satisfied that the majority of workers wanted to return to their jobs but were afraid to do so lest the strikers become violent, he guaranteed adequate police protection to any who wanted to return to their jobs. He personally warned “elements from among the active demonstrators [that] he intended to maintain law and order by force if necessary.” During the night of 14 December, the minister ordered the arrest of 16 known ringleaders and broke the strike (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2).

### Conclusion

The following day, those workers who retained their freedom returned to their jobs. They would remain at their places of employment until the *Tammuz* revolution occurred five years later.

The *Tammuz* revolution of 1958, like the Zahedi coup five years earlier, witnessed multiple border crossings between Iran and Iraq. When news reached Basra by radio of developments in the capital on 14 July 1958, Iraq citizens replaced all the European employees at local power stations; photographs of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser appeared in prominent positions (“Americans Delayed,” 1958). Thirty dependents of U.S. employees of Morrison Knudson left Basra on chartered aircraft (“Iraqi Pleads,” 1958); the border to Iran remained open for official transit two days a week (Hunt 1958). As a revolution was taking place over the border in Iraq, the Soviet ambassador, Pegov, requested an audience with Iran’s Shāh in Tehran. While “it was expected that he wanted to relay a stern Moscow warning that Iran must not be used as a base for counter-revolution against the new Iraqi regime,” in fact the diplomat invited Mohammad Rezá Pahlaví to return to Moscow for a second visit (Bigart 1958). The Shāh and Queen Soraya had paid a state visit to the U.S.S.R. during the Suez crisis of June–July 1956, before their divorce.

There is a distinct emphasis on individual agency among transnational anthropologists writing on border crossing. As just one example, Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar (2001) identify a “transnational cognitive space” to discuss individuality when writing on transnational migration. For many scholars, a focus on border crossing permits them to acknowledge agency, distancing themselves from a monolithic, stable, and naturalized understanding of culture. Cláudia Nascimento (2008, 58) accepts such border-crossers as “not any less authentic or natural than ones relation to her original culture.” Here, we acknowledge forms of collective identity for those who have crossed borders. While Iraqi

workers may not have wanted Mohammad Reẓā Shāh Pahlavī or his soldiers in Iraq, their political imaginary incorporated Iranian models as their own.

Never simply the sum total of transits by heads of state, Iraq's border with Iran was crossed by men and women of different economic positions. Older Iraqi Shi'a men often crossed the border to visit pilgrimage destinations in Iran; facing a political crisis, Iran's young leader and his wife reversed the direction of their transit, finding a day's respite in Karbala. In this discussion, we have drawn attention to the wider influence that developments in Iran had on politics in Iraq. Nationalization of petroleum production lured Iraqi vacationers over the border, where middle-class employers and their domestic workers learned the latest news. Breaking away from a model that emphasizes individual agency, we note that these forms of border crossing led to collective forms of political agency such as the strike organized by employees of the BPC. Such a shift toward collective agency redirects master narratives such as "self" and "other," "domestic" and "foreign," nationalist and internationalist, toward new outcomes. The coming together of Iraqi and Iranian labour activists' political imaginaries in the BPC strikes did not lead to (nor would it necessarily lead to) a collapse of boundaries between the two countries. Temporary and contingent comings-together, however, serve as evidence of widespread (if unsanctioned) border crossing.

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# Information Technology and the “Arab Spring”

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*The demonstrations, revolts, and protests collectively known as the “Arab Spring” have destabilized many long-standing autocratic governments in the Middle East. Central to this process were several types of information technology, including mobile phones, the Internet, notably social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. Unfortunately, this issue is often represented in simplistic, technologically deterministic terms. This article examines the distribution and growth of several digital information technologies in seven countries rocked by recent protests. It then outlines government attempts to censor the Arab Internet, and details how various information technologies—particularly video—were used by the Arab masses. Next it offers a conceptual analysis grounded in the works of Jürgen Habermas, asserting that information technology has democratized the sphere of public debate throughout the Arab world.*

*Keywords: Arab Spring, information technology, Internet, YouTube, Twitter*

*Les manifestations, révoltes et autres protestations connues sous le nom de « Printemps arabe » ont déstabilisé de nombreux régimes autocratiques du Moyen-Orient solidement ancrés. Au cœur de ce dispositif figurent différentes technologies de l'information : les téléphones portables, Internet et notamment les réseaux sociaux tels Twitter, YouTube et Facebook. Malheureusement, cette question est souvent présentée en des termes simplistes de technologie déterministe. Cet article examine la répartition et la croissance de plusieurs technologies d'information numérique dans sept pays secoués par les protestations récentes. Il présente ensuite les efforts des autorités pour censurer l'Internet arabe et décrit comment les différents types de technologies de l'information, particulièrement la vidéo, ont été utilisés par les masses arabes. Il présente ensuite une analyse conceptuelle ancrée dans les travaux de Jürgen Habermas, qui affirme que la technologie de l'information a démocratisé la sphère du débat public dans tout le Monde arabe.*

*Mots-clés : Printemps arabe, technologies de l'information, Internet, YouTube, Twitter*

The popular rebellions that have destabilized, and sometimes overthrown, some autocratic Arab governments since early 2011 have been the focus of considerable scholarly scrutiny. Beginning with Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, democratic movements consisting of hundreds of thousands of protestors, which enjoyed varying degrees of success,

became collectively known as the “Arab Spring” (Anderson 2011; Gause 2011; Lynch 2013). This loose collection of demonstrations, protests, riots, and, in the case of Syria, civil war has ushered in a new political chapter throughout the Arab world, with far-reaching implications.

One of the more insidious myths about the “Arab Spring” concerns the determinant role of information technologies: Web sites, chat rooms, and media stories contained numerous references to a “Facebook Revolution” or “YouTube Revolt.” There can be no doubt that information and communications technologies greatly enable popular political mobilization (Castells et al. 2007; Shirky 2011; Iskander 2011). However, in the technologically determinist, overly optimistic view that has played an important part in public discourses on the “Arab Spring,” widespread access to the Internet, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter led directly to unrest and revolt as users, primarily the young, were introduced to new sources of information and digital means of organizing. Unfortunately, the hyperbole swirling around this type of technological determinism is simplistic. For example, after the 2009 elections in Iran, there was much talk of a “Twitter Revolution,” and Twitter was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, even though at the time only 0.9 % of Iranians were actually on Twitter (Morozov 2011). Many forces other than information technology played key roles in driving the events of the “Arab Spring,” including widespread poverty, unemployment, rising food prices, and pervasive unhappiness with uncaring, corrupt, and frequently repressive governments. A more subtle and compelling view of information technology (IT) in the Arab context notes the prominence of national telecommunications providers, leading to high prices for access and use of IT; shortages of broadband; pronounced rural–urban divides; and the continued importance of face-to-face contacts and word of mouth as means of transmitting information. Thus, rather than *causing* the “Arab Spring,” IT must be seen as *enabling* it.

IT plays an increasingly important role in the dissemination of information about current events. In particular, it allows for “scale jumping,” the ability to transcend the confining effects of scale (Adams 1996). Given human geography’s recent attempts to destabilize the taken-for-grantedness of scale and reveal it as a social construction (Marston, Jones, and Woodward 2005), stimulating a lively debate about the meaning and relevance of scale in a relational world (Paasi 2004; Jones 2009; MacKinnon 2010), the scalar dimensions of IT use in the “Arab Spring” should be noted. National borders were significant, both because governments tried to limit flows of information beyond their borders, effectively keeping protests confined within their respective national territories, and because rebel groups sought precisely to

transcend those borders, using digital media to attract foreign audiences and turning local uprisings into objects of international attention. Subverting dominant scales can be a means to address the balance of power between prevailing discourses in society and those groups whose grievances originate from the social margins. Political dissent can “reach beyond the boundaries of place through communication media to substantiate their political claims, create openings for new ideas of scale and new scales of connection, and thereby challenge the social hierarchies embedded in pre-existing territorial contexts” (Adams 1996, 420). Telecommunications technologies provide a medium to allow messages outside the typical state-sanctioned information to be circulated throughout the population.

This article focuses IT’s role in the “Arab Spring” in several ways. We begin with a Habermasian conceptual analysis that asserts that digital media have enlarged the arena of public debate within Arab states by facilitating bypassing of government gatekeepers of information and by giving voice to the voiceless. Second, we offer an overview of the degree to which digital media have diffused through the societies in question, including mobile phones and the Internet. Third, we turn to the attempts by many Arab governments to control flows of information within and across their borders, including censorship. Fourth, we chart empirically how various digital technologies played key roles in fomenting unrest, noting the significance of video as well as that of the social media platforms Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. The conclusion reiterates our major findings.

### **Arab Cyberdemocracies? A Habermasian Critique**

As several scholars have argued, digital technologies are gradually undermining state control of information in many societies, slowly encouraging moves toward more democratic forms of governance (Slane 2007). Cyberspace by itself, of course, does not automatically produce positive or negative effects, for the information that circulates over the Web or on Twitter is invariably mediated through national and local political cultures, including censorship and self-censorship. Within the Arab world, as mounting numbers of people—particularly the young—gain access to and become comfortable with digital technologies, the Internet has dramatically expanded opportunities for diffusing political information and mobilizing in political activity, undermining long-held monopolies over the mass media. Cyberspace is relatively cheap and easy to use, which eliminates two serious obstacles to use by the poor. Because digital communications have become widely dispersed, cyberspace and civil society are now locked in an

ongoing process of mutual transformation and co-evolution.

IT in the “Arab Spring” bears an uncannily close resemblance to Jürgen Habermas’s (1979, 1989) famous “ideal speech situation,” a hypothetical arena characterized by unrestrained discourse in which truth is socially constructed in the absence of political and economic obstacles to communication. Habermas’s line of thought—which evolved decades before the Internet became widespread among the public—holds that unconstrained communications are essential to the social processes of constructing a consensus, in which participants may participate regardless of their social positionality. The ideal speech situation serves as a counterfactual yardstick to assess various social contexts and the obstacles that generate distorted communication (Bernstein 1995; Luhmann 1996). In this world view, truth is not located in some abstract, transcendental Platonic realm but is deeply grounded in social praxis.

Cyberspace arguably exemplifies the Habermasian vision more powerfully than does any other social phenomenon today (Salter 2003). E-mail, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and related technologies such as mobile phones have greatly empowered many citizens of Arab countries, facilitated raucous and unfettered debates, and generated significant, if occasionally unintended, political outcomes. Such an argument is not meant to glorify digital technologies uncritically or to engage in a simplistic form of determinism; the digital divide within the Arab world, as manifested in serious discrepancies in access depending on age, gender, and educational level, testifies that the region’s pronounced social and spatial inequalities are replicated in Arab cyberspace. Distinct digital divides do exist when it comes to Internet access in Arab nations, and most people who are online belong to the relatively wealthier segments of their societies. For this reason, many initial protestors in Arab societies, especially Egypt, were members of the upper middle class and able to access Internet sites to coordinate their activities (Faris 2013).

Arab government attempts at censorship, which are exposed most flagrantly during moments of acute political crisis, constitute another significant obstacle. Despite these limitations, however, digital technologies have clearly had profound impacts on the Arab public’s capacity to make its collective voice heard. Froomkin (2003, 856) argues that, “in Habermasian terms, the Internet draws power back into the public sphere, away from other systems.”

It is worth noting that the Habermasian ideal type of societies that enjoy unfettered freedom of communication is not without its critics. In particular, Fraser (2007) takes Habermas to task for a geographic imaginary that implicitly centres on the Westphalian world order of self-contained national states, particularly through his

emphasis on national languages, national economies, and national media channels. IT and globalization have posed decisive challenges to this assumption, making national borders more porous and public spheres ever more transnational in character.

### **Charting the Arab Space of Flows**

IT in various forms has long played an important role in the cultural and political life of various Muslim societies (Warf and Vincent 2007). Cassette tapes, for example, were important in the 1979 revolution that toppled the Shah of Iran. Cassettes are still popular in many Arab countries, including Egypt (Hirschkind 2006). However, the rise of digital technologies has greatly reduced their use as other forms of media, notably the Internet, have grown in significance.

Despite the media and scholarly attention devoted to the role of the Internet in the “Arab Spring,” in reality it is mobile phones (cell-phones) that are by far the most widespread digital technology in the region. Some mobile phones, of course, can access the Internet, so this distinction at times is unclear; however, in most developing countries, “smart phones” with Internet access are relatively uncommon. As Table 1 shows, the seven countries that have experienced the most pronounced upheaval have essentially ubiquitous mobile phone usage: in many countries, mobile phone penetration rates exceed 100 %, and only in Syria and Yemen is usage relatively low. A cottage industry of scholars has documented the enormous role this technology has played in reshaping everyday life around the world (Ling 2004, 2010; Farman 2011), but relatively little has been said about its political implications. Mobile communication technologies allow users to interact with one another to an unprecedented degree and have led to a mounting porosity between the private and public realms. As Sheller and Urry (2006) note, mobile information technologies have had profound implications for the nature of urban public space, altering mobilities, meanings, and practices and redefining location not as a given place through which people and information flow but as a more nebulous, dematerialized set of practices in which the physical and the virtual are shot through with each other. Mobile phones, because they are cheap and ubiquitous, offer many in the Arab world—particularly those without Internet access or with limited literacy—an unprecedented ability to communicate at scales that transcend the domain of face-to-face contacts.

Table 1: Mobile Phone (Cellphone) Penetration Rates in “Arab Spring” States, 2011

	<b>Penetration Rate (%)</b>	<b>Users (000s)</b>
Bahrain	127.9	1,693
Egypt	101.8	83,425
Jordan	118.2	7,482
Libya	155.7	10,000
Syria	63.2	13,117
Tunisia	116.9	12,387
Yemen	47.0	11,668

Source: International Telecommunications Union.

Internet penetration rates vary considerably among the “Arab Spring” countries (see Table 2). In poorer countries, such as Yemen, and those in which the government has long attempted to restrict Internet use, such as Libya, less than one-fifth of the population may enjoy access; conversely, Bahrain’s 77 % penetration rate is equal to that of the United States. In Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, Facebook users constitute a majority of netizens, but this is less true elsewhere.

Table 2: Internet Penetration and Growth Rates in “Arab Spring” States

	<b>Penetration Rate, June 2012</b>	<b>Internet Users (000s)</b>	<b>% Growth in Users 2000–12</b>	<b>Facebook Users (000s)</b>
Bahrain	77.0	961.2	2 302.0	375.
Egypt	35.6	29 809.7	6 524.2	11 764.9
Jordan	38.1	2 481.9	1 848.9	n/a.
Libya	17.0	954.3	9 443.3	671.9
Syria	22.5	5 069.4	16 796.7	n/a.
Tunisia	39.1	4 196.6	4 096.6	3 246.3
Yemen	14.9	3 691.0	24 506.7	633.

Source: <http://internetworldstats.com>

There are, of course, wide variations within countries as well as among them. Unfortunately, data on the age, gender, and ethnicity of Internet users in the Arab world are not widely available. If the experience of other countries in the developing world is any guide, however, Arab netizens are more likely to be younger, better educated, and more urbanized than their national counterparts who do not use the Internet. The growth of digital technologies among Arab youth has long been recognized. Speaking of the Saudi context, but in comments with wide applicability to young people throughout the Arab world, Kalathil and Boas (2003, 116) note that “the current generation of Saudi youth (which is large and growing rapidly) is better educated, more literate, and more

aware of the outside world than ever before and is likely to want increased access to information on the Internet.” In addition to variations in access, there are also significant differences in the price of telecommunications services. In countries in which governments hold telecommunications monopolies, typically in which former state-owned firms hold a dominant market position (e.g., Telecom Egypt, Syria Telecom), the price of access remains comparatively high: in Syria, for example, access costs until 2003 were more than \$2 per hour, in a country whose per capita income averaged \$110 per month (data for costs since 2003 are not available).

### Internet Censorship in “Arab Spring” States

Many parts of the Arab world, as well as Iran, have an unfortunately long history of media censorship, including censorship of cyberspace (ANHRI 2004; Warf 2010). Decades of state repression of flows of information not conducive to state interests have produced intimidated journalists, a scarcity of good books, and a relatively quiescent media apparatus. Most Middle Eastern governments have resorted to some kind of limitation on free speech and the media, including technical blocking of Web sites; legislation that restricts anonymity; intimidation, harassment, or firing of journalists; cyber-assaults against opposition Web sites (e.g., hashtag bombing on Twitter); and content manipulation of state-run media.

In this context, cyber-journalists, bloggers, and online news editors have suffered penalties for “sighting the Islamic faith,” advocating “blasphemy” against ruling dynasties, or promoting “immoral behaviour” defined in politically expedient terms (including pornography, homosexuality, and gambling). Governments in the Arab world often justify censorship on the dubious grounds that such measures protect Islamic values against an ostensible onslaught of Western decadence (Hofheinz 2005). As numerous human-rights and civil-liberties organizations have pointed out, however, autocratic governments are often afraid of their citizens’ having access to *any* political information that might challenge state-sanctioned discourses designed to legitimate ruling elites.

One measure of the severity of censorship in “Arab Spring” states may be gleaned from the evaluation of Reporters Without Borders, an NGO headquartered in Paris and arguably the world’s pre-eminent judge of Internet censorship. Their index of Internet censorship is generated from 50-question surveys sent to legal experts, reporters, and scholars in each country. As Table 3 shows, the Arab states in question rank quite high, putting them among the world’s worst censors. Even the most lenient state involved, Jordan, is nonetheless ranked 128 out of 179 countries, while Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria are among the world’s most severe censorship regimes.



Table 3: Reporters Without Borders Internet Censorship Scores, 2011

Country	Rank (/179)	Score (/142)
Bahrain	173	125
Egypt	166	97
Jordan	128	57
Libya	154	77
Syria	176	138
Tunisia	134	60
Yemen	171	101

Source: Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index 2011–12,  
<http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012,1043.html>

A common fallacy related to censorship is the “dictator’s dilemma,” in which autocratic governments are forced to choose between openness to the global information economy, on the one hand, and control over flows of news that may pose an existential threat, on the other. Morozov (2011) is scathing in exposing the fallacy of cyber-optimism, which paints dictators as incompetent and on the verge of being dethroned by tech-savvy youngsters. In reality, many states, including those in the Arab world, are quite adept at identifying the potential of digital technologies and using them against their own populations.

While Arab Internet censorship is most acute in countries such as Saudi Arabia, governments in countries rocked by the “Arab Spring” also tried to limit access to the Internet and the content that residents could access. Some countries, such as Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, are relatively lenient with respect to Internet regulation; typically, such states are oriented toward the West and at least grudgingly accept the need for democratic access to the Internet, as is the case in Jordan (Cunningham 2002).

Egypt, even under the Mubarak regime, was often touted as having relatively low levels of Internet censorship. Yet in 2004 the Egyptian government created the Department to Combat Crimes of Computers and Internet for the purpose of monitoring “subversive” Internet sites, and harassed computer programmers, journalists, and human rights activists for violating censorship standards. Shuhdi Surour, Webmaster for the newspaper *al-Ahram Weekly*, was jailed for posting online a poem that was critical of the regime. However, the government’s attempts to prevent the publication of several books led many authors to seek alternative outlets on the Internet (Gauch 2001).

In Syria, the regime of Bashar al-Assad routinely blocks access to Kurdish-language news sites and any domain name ending in “.il” (Israel; ANHRI 2004). Faced with a massive and immensely bloody uprising, the Assad regime shut down the entire Syrian Internet on 29 November 2012,

blaming the incident on a “terrorist attack.” Syria had shut down Internet access in specific locations over the previous 20 months, but a total blackout had never been attempted (Chulov 2012). Another shutdown occurred on 7–8 May 2013. Many suspect that Assad understands how keeping the Internet live benefits his government by enabling tracking of rebel groups, as he has been reported to comment on his “electronic army” (Fisher 2012). The Syrian Electronic Army, a pro-Assad group, has repeatedly hacked Web sites and Twitter accounts of the opposition (Perlroth 2013). Although Internet service was restored within 24 hours in the case of both blackouts, the blackout is a testament to the complete control governments have over communications when there are few service providers.

Similarly, cellphone data are suspected to be censored by many of these governments. In 2010, both the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia threatened to ban the use of Blackberry devices because their data are sent through private central servers in Canada maintained by Research in Motion (RIM, recently renamed Blackberry), the company that produces Blackberry phones, thus preventing information monitoring by individual governments. While the ban ultimately did not happen, thanks to an agreement between RIM and the UAE, RIM made several concessions, including putting independent servers within the UAE that could be monitored by the government (*Trend* 2010; Whitney 2010).

Thus, major changes in how people acquire and exchange information are highly significant to the recent rounds of political unrest. Horrifying events in the past that governments could easily cover up—such as Syria’s bloody repression of a revolt in Homs in 1982—increasingly are brought to light through the mass diffusion of cellphones with cameras, Twitter accounts, YouTube, and other social media. The significance of these technologies is enhanced when recipients of a particular bundle of information help to disseminate it via face-to-face contacts and informal social links. For example, given the relatively low Internet penetration rates in some Arab societies, it is safe to assume that news received via YouTube videos is likely transmitted through word-of-mouth. All of this is to say that the Internet *per se* did not *cause* the “Arab Spring” but, rather, played a catalytic role, galvanizing public opinion and facilitating mass resistance.

### **Information Technology and “Arab Spring” Movements**

Without romanticizing or mythologizing the Internet as an automatic guarantor of civil liberties, it is nonetheless worth noting that cyberspace has gradually widened the sphere of political debate in the Arab world (Ghareeb 2000). As penetration rates have steadily climbed, particularly

among the young, new sources of information, including sources from abroad, have percolated into several domains of civil society, with complex and often unintended consequences. The gradual decline in governments' monopoly positions in the provision of news has been directly abetted by the emergence of new online sources of information.

Tunisia offers important insights into the dynamics of IT in turbulent Arab states. Prior to the Jasmine Revolution that toppled Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, the government blocked access to Hotmail and human-rights Web sites; in addition, every Internet service provider (ISP) was required to submit a monthly list of subscribers to the government censorship agency. In 2002, cyber-activist Zohair Ben Said al Yehiawy was sentenced to jail for two-and-a-half years for criticizing corrupt police and judicial practices. The police harassment and subsequent suicide of Sidi Bouzid fruit vendor Mohammed Bouazizi in December 2010, captured on a grainy cellphone video that was then posted on Facebook (Diamond and Plattner 2012), catalyzed popular anger and paved the way for mass political protests. In an analysis of refugees fleeing Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, Paradiso (2013) notes that according to those who fled to the Italian island of Lampedusa, where she conducted her fieldwork, cellphones and YouTube were the primary sources of information about the rapidly changing political scene and a common means of staying in touch with one another.

In Arab societies in which literacy is limited, digital images, particularly video, play a key role in swaying public opinion. In the Bouazizi case, video was critical in relaying the news about the fruit vendor's self-immolation. A similar event in Monastir several months earlier had sparked no response, simply because it had not been filmed (Khondker 2011). However, given the large number of videos uploaded to YouTube, simply filming an event does not guarantee it widespread exposure; it is typically only when a homemade video is picked up by a mass media outlet such as Al Jazeera that it "goes viral" and reaches a very large audience. Thus, the famously insulting satire of the Prophet Mohammed that inflamed so much public opinion throughout the Muslim world received notoriety only once it had been given exposure by television outlets. The video of Bouazizi was picked up by Al Jazeera as well as being posted on Facebook, creating public and international knowledge of the event. Twitter also played a role in the spread of the Bouazizi video, and people began to follow the hashtag #sidibouzid for information regarding any revolutionary activity (Lotan et al. 2011). A news report of the event posted on 19 January 2011 by Al Jazeera English can be viewed on YouTube.<sup>1</sup> More recently, video has been used by women in Saudi Arabia to protest the driving restrictions placed on them; several videos have been uploaded to YouTube and later posted on the Facebook page #supportwomen2drive. These videos from May 2011 all depict Saudi

women illegally driving cars. Similar to the Bouazizi video, they were picked up by Al Jazeera and spread through its traditional media outlets. Twitter use in Saudi Arabia has also mushroomed, posing an additional threat to the regime (Worth 2012).

Video streams were used to reach wide audiences during the Egyptian protests as well. When an Egyptian blogger, Khaled Said, was beaten to death outside a cybercafé in Alexandria on 6 June 2010, the café owner recorded a video interview about the event, which, along with photos of Said, was quickly posted online and spread through social media sites. A Google executive who picked up on the story created a Facebook page in response titled “We are all Khaled Said” (Khondker 2011). The page, which is still active on Facebook, currently has a total of 293 924 “likes,” down from 350 000 on 14 January 2011.<sup>2</sup> Although this is an example of violence against an activist, it has been argued that many soldiers did not respond violently to protestors specifically because they knew they were on camera (Howard and Hussain 2011). News outlets reported citizens’ using their mobile-phone cameras in a variety of ways to report their own action in the protests. Many took photos of themselves being arrested or sitting on abandoned army vehicles, which they then uploaded to Facebook or Twitter (Howard and Hussain 2011). Video content and other imagery, spread online in a variety of ways, should be seen as a primary method of spreading knowledge about ongoing events.

In Egypt, it is widely observed that the initial protests were organized through Facebook. The early protests were organized on Facebook by the activist group April 6 Youth Movement (Stepanova 2011). On the date of the first protest, 25 January 2011, approximately 85 000 people had pledged to join the movement through Facebook (Bhuiyan 2011). Although it is uncertain how many people were involved in the protests, thousands assembled in Tahrir Square on 25 January, and thousands more were protesting in other areas of the country, such as Alexandria, Mansura, and Aswan. Only two days later, government interference in Facebook, Twitter, and Blackberry services was reported. By 29 January, cellphone service disruption was also reported (Al Jazeera English 2011). On 27 January, the Egyptian government effectively shut down telecommunications services for several days in an effort to suppress the movement in Cairo (see Figure 1), a relatively easy feat because the country has only five ISPs. Although IT was important in getting the initial word out quickly, “without the perseverance of the Egyptian people, the revolution would have never happened” (Bhuiyan 2011, 15).

Twitter was also a popular mode of information sharing in Egypt’s supposed “Facebook Revolution”:

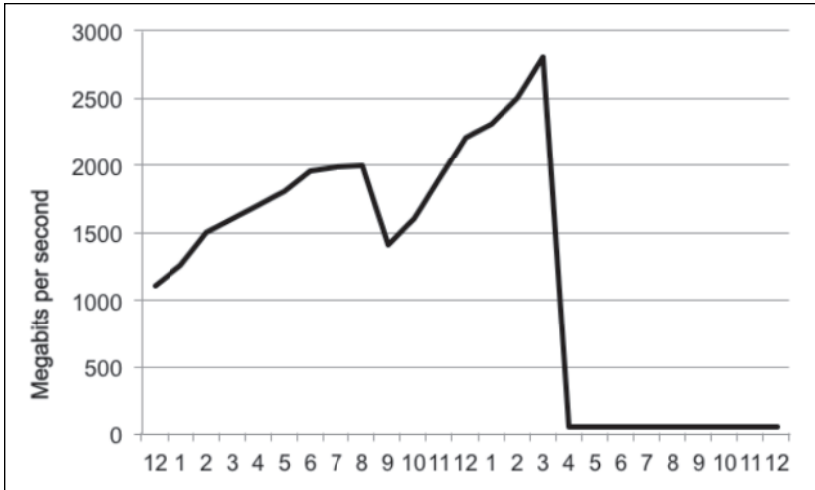


Figure 1:  
 Egyptian Internet traffic on 27 January 2011  
 Source: redrawn from Wall Street Journal (2011).

Philip Howard (2011) quoted an activist in Cairo as saying, “We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world” ... [summing] up the use of social media in the protest. (Bhuiyan 2011, 16)

As in Tunisia, protest organizers created a Twitter hashtag to post tweets referencing events in the uprising. The hashtag #Jan25 became a way to follow events occurring on the ground in Egypt (Lotan et al. 2011). Although Twitter was blocked by the Egyptian government early on in the protests, its services continued to be used: Google released its speak2tweet technology, whereby people can call a phone number and leave a voice message that is then converted to an audio file and subsequently posted on Twitter (Al Jazeera English 2011). In this way people could still use Twitter to follow the events unfolding in Egypt.

Despite the blocking of Twitter, “people were able to coordinate protests and bring out larger numbers because of Facebook and Twitter” (Bhuiyan 2011, 16). The revolution in Egypt had been building steadily over time, and tools such as Twitter helped protestors gather strength quickly. Clearly the Egyptian government believed that people were using Twitter to gain support, since it shut down the service after a few days of protests. Google was also convinced that Twitter was getting information about the revolt out of the country, as it launched speak2tweet sooner than planned. However, as Stepanova (2011) points out, during both the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions there were only a few thousand identifiable Twitter accounts in each country. Bhuiyan (2011, 18) aptly sums

up the use of IT in Egypt: “perhaps social media was not absolutely critical to the uprising in Egypt; however, it made protest possible sooner, and helped it develop in a way that would have been impossible without social media.”

Digital media have also played a particularly important role in the long, bloody Syrian rebellion against the Assad regime, which to date has claimed more than 70 000 lives. Chozick (2012) notes that “if the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt were Twitter Revolutions, then Syria is becoming the Skype Rebellion.” Often rebels rely on smuggled telecommunications equipment such as cellphones and mobile handsets. Conversely, the regime has initiated its own efforts, including checkpoints where pro-Assad forces inspect laptop computers for programs that allow users to bypass government spyware. With only one ISP in the country, Syria’s Internet is relatively easy to shut down. The pro-government Syrian Electronic Army has initiated cyber-attacks against rebel Web sites. Syria has also been accused of deliberately infecting activists’ computers with malware in an effort to maintain surveillance of this population (Galperin and Marquis-Boire 2012). Video again emerged as a tool for showcasing uprising activity in Syria. YouTube made several changes to its policy of not allowing users to upload videos that contain high levels of violence. Many activists in Syria have documented, through pictures or video on mobile phones, the violent treatment of protestors by the military; these videos have been allowed to remain on YouTube for the time being, despite their violent nature (Howard and Hussain 2011).

Even in Bahrain, where political upheaval was relatively contained, the Internet has emerged as a tool to challenge the ruling Khalifa dynasty (MacFarquhar 2006). Wheeler (2005) charts the numerous ways in which the Internet has infiltrated daily life in Kuwait, helping to stir opposition to the government. More recently, several human-rights-themed accounts on Twitter have started to expose government treatment of citizens. Abuses such as the arrest of Bahraini human-rights blogger Mahmood al-Yousif were followed by accounts such as @Bahrainrights and @OnlineBahrain. Images from Google Earth were also circulated, showing the income disparity between the minority Sunni ruling class and the Shi’a majority (Howard and Hussain 2011). Many of the videos and other information shared via Twitter and Facebook were uploaded by individuals; the reach of this content would have been small had it not been picked up by players in major media outlets such as Al Jazeera (Lotan et al. 2011). Howard and Hussain (2011) point to Al Jazeera’s new media strategy as the focal point of their success in spreading word about the events occurring in the Middle East. The Qatar-based news outlet made most of its content readily available for use on mobile devices and social media sites; their journalists were also connected through social media to activists and other journalists on the ground in locations where

uprisings were occurring. If journalists from Al Jazeera were not able to be in a country because of harassment or a ban, they found other ways to connect to the events and report to the rest of the world through social media sources (Howard and Hussain 2011). Although many of the messages about events did not come directly from a mainstream media account, such as @AJEnglish or @AJArabic (Al Jazeera’s English and Arabic Twitter handles, respectively), the information was spread by journalists working for Al Jazeera. Lotan et al. (2011) explains that in Egypt especially, most of the information streams on Twitter began with either a journalist or an activist and were then spread by other journalists or activists. The reach of the average citizen was nowhere near as high as that of individual journalists or activists.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Major social, economic, cultural, and political changes have unfolded across the Arab world since 2011, including rapidly rising opposition to longstanding dictatorial political regimes. The Internet, social media, and other digital technologies did not, by themselves, cause the “Arab Spring,” but it is difficult to imagine these revolts, demonstrations, and (in the case of Syria) civil war occurring without them. It is important not to overstate the effects of cyber-technology, as many other forces played important roles in fomenting unrest; conversely, however, it is naïve to ignore the role of the Internet altogether. The “Arab Spring” is thus neither reducible to the catalytic role of IT nor independent of it; the two phenomena must be seen as mutually transformative.

One dimension that simultaneously reflects and amplifies these transformations is the diffusion of digital technologies. While often overlooked by the popular media, mobile phones (cellphones) are by far the most commonly distributed of these, often exceeding 100 % penetration rates. Cellphones are increasingly important not only for their ability to transmit voice data but for their cameras and, increasingly, their capacity to upload photos and video to the Web, a phenomenon of particular importance in jump-starting the Tunisian uprising. Internet penetration rates, in contrast, are lower and range widely, from a mere 14.9 % in Yemen to 77 % in Bahrain (see Table 1). However, as in many developing countries, access to the Internet is growing explosively, particularly among the young and well educated, with unpredictable long-term consequences.

The role of IT in mobilizing public opinion and galvanizing unrest is all the more remarkable given the long history of state repression of media in most Arab countries. Despite long-standing government attempts to restrict Internet access, control online content, and intimidate journalists (cyber and otherwise), the diffusion of digital media has

undermined the information gatekeeping role that most Arab governments have assigned themselves. Thus, the space of flows in the Arab world has increasingly shifted from a “one to many” model to one best characterized by “many to many” transmissions, democratizing access to unfettered information. Video—particularly that recorded by observers on the street, and especially when it is then publicized by more mainstream media channels such as Al Jazeera—is especially critical here. Moreover, different technologies have divergent impacts and significance in various national contexts, including the central roles of YouTube in Tunisia, Twitter in Egypt, and Skype in Syria.

In the context of the ideal speech situation proposed by Habermas—still arguably the best defining intellectual standard by which democratic ideals are measured—the diffusion of IT has significantly broadened the sphere of public debate, given voice to the formerly voiceless, and enhanced the power of ordinary citizens and observers on the Arab street. All this is not to say that IT is in and of itself inherently democratizing (the error made by most technological determinists); after all, digital media are also used by Islamic fundamentalists, repressive state regimes, transnational corporations, and other anti-democratic forces. Nonetheless, it is no coincidence that rising cellphone and Internet penetration rates have occurred simultaneously with increasingly well organized opposition to long-standing political regimes, exposing widespread government corruption, nepotism, repression, indifference, and incompetence. To the degree that the forces propelling the “Arab Spring” were enabled by IT, rising penetration rates may presage yet more rounds of turbulence and upheaval to come.

## Notes

1. See “Suicide that sparked a revolution” (video posted to YouTube), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47d6fyaOjRM>.
2. See “We are all Khaled Said” (Facebook page), <https://www.facebook.com/elshaheed.co.uk?fref=ts>.

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# The Evolution of Regional Planning and Regional Economic Development in Malaysia

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*This article explains the evolution of regional planning and policy in Malaysia and discusses the implications of the underlying regional economic theories and regional policies for the socio-economic development of Malaysia. Regional economic development in Malaysia is due to several factors, including the integration of geography and physical features, the need for cooperation beyond local jurisdictions, and the needs of local and national economic development. A review of the literature suggests that the achievement and development of regional planning would differ depending on the country's pattern of development and growth. However, the basis of regional planning remains the same: to promote competitiveness, create economic opportunities, and achieve balance in the socio-economic development of a country. In a way, regional planning is a tool to achieve sustainable development in a country.*

*Keywords: regional planning, regional development, regional economic development, Malaysia*

*Cet article propose une explication de l'évolution de la planification régionale et de ses politiques en Malaisie ; il passe en revue les théories de l'économie régionale et les stratégies de politiques régionales pour le développement socio-économique dans ce pays. Le développement économique régional est lié à plusieurs facteurs, dont l'intégration de la géographie et de la morphologie physique, la nécessité de coopération au-delà des juridictions locales, ainsi que les besoins spécifiques du développement économique local et national. Une analyse des publications sur le sujet indique que la réussite et le développement de la planification régionale varierait en fonction du modèle national de développement et de croissance. Néanmoins, la base même de la planification régionale reste inchangée : il s'agit de promouvoir la compétitivité, de créer des opportunités économiques et de réaliser un équilibre dans le développement socio-économique du pays. D'une certaine manière, la planification régionale est un outil pour réaliser un développement durable dans un pays.*

*Mots-clés : planification régionale, développement régional, développement économique régional, Malaisie*

## **Introduction**

Following Malaysia's independence from Britain in 1957, the implementation of regional development policies and strategies has sped up the urbanization and development changes in the economic growth. In Malaysia, development objectives are spread within the five-year Malaysia Plans. Regional planning in Malaysia began after World War II; the establishment of regional planning in the Draft Development Plan of 1950 was intended to rebuild Malaysian economic development (Eskandarian and Ghalehtimouri 2011). Since then, the regional planning has become a primary development strategy to spur economic and social development in Malaysia.

Regional development approaches and strategies in Malaysia have changed alongside development needs. In addition, various types of regional development initiatives have been implemented in Malaysia, such as the inter- and intra-regional policies, the opening of new growth centres under the jurisdiction of Regional Development Authorities (RDAs), and new regional economic development corridors involving jurisdiction beyond the local and national levels (Zainul Bahrin 1989). Identifying factors that promote regional development is essential in taking appropriate action to enhance, consolidate, or scale down development efforts in the regions concerned (Zainul Bahrin 1989, 5). The objective of this article, therefore, is to provide understanding and information on regional planning and development in Malaysia.

## **Regional Development in Malaysia**

Regional development involves the interaction and function of spatial development toward income, employment, and welfare issues (Friedmann and Alonso 1964). The process of regional development describes the allocation of activities and investment decisions within a region (Friedmann 2001). Regional development has become a global phenomenon of Third World countries since the 1950s (Scott and Storper 1990) including Malaysia (Ghani Salleh 2000), where the implementation of regional development strategies is included in every Five-Year Development Plan.

Malaysian national development planning can be divided into three phases: the Long-Term Plan, the Five-Year Development Plan, and the Mid-Term Review of the Five-Year Plan (Nik Hashim 1994). The Long-Term Plan is the Outline Perspective Plan (OPP), which began with the First Outline Perspective Plan (OPP1, 1971–90) during the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1970–90) under the Second Malaysia Plan

(1961–65). Its goal was to improve rural living standards (Zainul Bahrin 1989; Fatimah and Mad Nasir 1997). The Second Outline Perspective Plan (OPP2, 1991–2000) was implemented during the period of the National Development Policy (NDP, 1991–2000), and the Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3, 2001–2010) covered the period of the National Vision Policy (NVP, 2001–2010).

*During and After the Colonial Era, 1786–1970*

There is a lack of literature on the development planning and urbanization process in Malaysia during the British colonial period (1786–1957; Dani Salleh 2002). According to the contemporary studies, the urbanization process began with the British exploitation of natural resources for export activity and the growth of the Straits Settlements of Penang and the mining towns of Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur (Dani Salleh 2002). During that period, development policies were structured with minor involvement from the government (INTAN 1992), resulting in regional disparities (INTAN 1992; Eskandarian and Ghalehtemouri 2011).

TABLE 1

Growth of output and income: 1956–65

Development indicators	First Malaya Five-Year Plan (1956–60)	Second Malaya Five-Year Plan (1961–65)
Real GDP growth, %/year	4	6.4
Private motor vehicle consumption, persons/vehicle	82	56
Wireless ownership, persons/set	24	21
Annual domestic electricity consumption, kWh/person	31	44

Source: *First Malaysia Plan, 1966–70*

The first Five-Year Development Plan began with the First Malaysia Plan (1966–1970). Before Malaysia became independent, however, the First Malayan Development Plan (1956–60) was introduced to improve living standards for the local people (Chandra Muzaffar 1989). This plan was the first systematic development planning approach (Evers, Ramli, and Nienkemper 2010) that laid the foundation of national development planning in Malaysia. The First Malayan Development Plan (1956–60), also known as the First Malaya Five-Year Development Plan (Nik Hashim 1994) or the First Malaya

Plan (Mohamed Aslam and Asan Ali 2003), was prepared by the Economic Secretariat in 1955 to strengthen rural development (Nik Hashim 1994) and the agriculture sector (Lin 1994) in Malaysia.

According to the First Malaysia Plan (1966–70), the Malaya Development Plan was successful in improving economic conditions. As Table 1 shows, between 1960 and 1965 the real gross domestic product grew at an average annual rate of 6.4 %, compared to 4 % per year over the previous five years. There was also some improvement in income levels, judging by the increase in private motor vehicle ownership and per-capita annual domestic electricity consumption.

The period of the Second Malaya Development Plan (1961–65) was a continuous effort by the government to promote economic growth and achieve comprehensive national development planning (Nik Hashim 1994). Moreover, the plan was part of the government's strategy to achieve sustainable economic and social development, which was incorporated into the modern agriculture and industrial sectors (Lin 1994). Before the 1970s, there was a gap in economic development among Malaysia's 11 states, notably between the developed states of the western region (Selangor, Perak, Penang, and Negeri Sembilan) and less developed states in the northern and eastern parts of Peninsular Malaysia (Hamzah Jusoh 1992; Ghani Salleh 2000; Wee 2006). This led to the establishment of the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) as part of the strategy implemented under the introduction of regional planning in the First Malaysia Plan (1966–70; Hamzah Jusoh 1992). Regional planning was introduced in response to the economic gap between states. According to Mohd Yusof Kasim (1992), the regional planning strategy to overcome this crisis involved opening more new land and reducing land hunger, poverty, and unemployment in rural areas. Regional planning strategies to reduce disparities among states were carried forward into the second period of the five-year development plan.

#### *The New Economic Policy (NEP), 1970–90*

The Second Malaya Development Plan (1961–65) established manufacturing activities in less developed areas as one strategy toward industrializing the country (Evers et al. 2010). This policy was continued in the First Malaysia Plan (1966–70). The introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1971–90) under the Second Malaysia Plan (1971–75) was the regional development strategy to overcome disparities that contributed to race riots in 1969 (Chee 1990; Mohamed Aslam and Asan Ali 2003; Evers et al. 2010).

The introduction of NEP was also aimed at eradicating poverty and restructuring Malaysian society (Chee 1990; Shamsul Amri 1994;

Fatimah and Mad Nasir 1997; Siwar and Kasim 1997; Cheng 2011). In order to strengthen the strategy, the Regional Development Authorities (RDAs)—Southeast Pahang Regional Authority (DARA), Northern Pahang Regional Authority (JENGKA), Central Terengganu Regional Authority (KETENGAH), Southeast Johor Regional Authority (KEJORA), Southeast Kelantan Regional Authority (KESEDAR), Kedah (KEDA), and Pinang Regional Development Authority (PERDA)—were established (Ghani Salleh 2000; Ibrahim Ngah 2010) under the purview of the Minister of Land and Regional Development (Hamzah Jusoh 1992).

As well as raising living standards, the regional development strategy also focused on reducing income disparities between regions and states in Malaysia (Mohd Yusof Kasim 1992). Through opening new land, the strategy was able to enhance rural incomes and create jobs in the agriculture sector. As Table 2 shows, the Second Malaysia Plan (1971–75) was successful in create employment in the agriculture sector. This was especially true in the states of West Malaysia.

TABLE 2  
The Growth of Employment in West Malaysia, 1971–75\*

Sector	1970 (est.)		1975 (target)		Increase 1971–75 No. (000)
	No. (000)	% of total	No. (000)	% of total	
<i>Agriculture</i>	1 454	49.5	1 579	46	125
<i>Industry</i>	456	15.5	594	17.3	138
Mining	64	2.2	60	1.7	-4
Manufacturing	270	9.2	378	11	108
Construction	103	3.5	133	3.9	30
Utilities	19	0.6	23	0.7	4
<i>Services</i>	1 030	35.0	1 262	36.7	232
Commerce	340	11.6	419	12.2	79
Transport, storage & communication	110	3.7	122	3.6	12
Other services	580	19.7	721	21	141
Total	2 940	100	3 435	100	495

\*Data on employment include employed persons under 15 and over 65 years old.

Source: *Second Malaysia Plan (1971–75)*

In the late 1970s, the Malaysian economy underwent some significant changes as a result of of NEP programs. Lin (1994) and Wood (2005) argue that the period of the Third Malaysia Plan (1976–80) saw a significant transformation and increase in growth. On the other hand, regional



planning was expanded to further eradicate disparity among regions and society (Dayang-Affizzah and Muzafar Shah 2006). In 1976, the incidence of poverty was high in several states, including Kelantan, Kedah, and Terengganu, as shown in Table 3; these states had the lowest mean monthly household incomes relative to other developed states such as Wilayah Persekutuan and Selangor.

TABLE 3  
Incidence of Poverty and Mean Monthly Household Income, 1976

State	Incidence of poverty (%)	Mean monthly household income, ringgit Malaysia (RM)*
Johor	29	513
Kedah	61	306
Kelantan	67.1	269
Melaka	32.4	568
Negeri Sembilan	33	505
Pahang	38.9	477
Pulau Pinang	32.4	589
Perak	43	436
Perlis	59.8	338
Sabah	58.3	513
Sarawak	56.5	426
Selangor	22.9	735
Terengganu	60.3	339
Wilayah Persekutuan	9	1058

\*Current prices

Source: OPP2 (1991, 51–52)

The regional development strategy continued to be a major development instrument in reducing the economic disparities between regions and states. Data from the 1970s and 1980s indicate a decline in the incidence of poverty, from 49.3 % in 1970 to 29.2 % in 1980, as a result of rapid economic and social development programs implemented during this period (Fourth Malaysia Plan, 1981–85, 106). The Fourth Malaysia Plan introduced more changes in the regional development strategy, with an emphasis on balancing the socio-economic development of the population (Shafari Che Hashim n.d.). In addition, Malaysia's states were divided into six regions, based on similarities in resources and economic activities (Mohamed Aslam and Asan Ali 2003): Northern region, Central region, Eastern region, Southern region, Sabah, and Sarawak (Cho 1990). Each region is dominated by a single metropolitan area or growth centre (Cho 1990; Mohamed Aslam and Asan Ali 2003). Under

the regional development strategy, all states have undergone the process of urbanization (Fauza Abd. Ghaffar 2000). The regional development strategy continued to be major development instrument in reducing economic disparities between regions and states.

The regional development strategy in the Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986–90) was targeted to encourage urbanization and, at the same time, to focus on environmental issues arising from the intensity of new development in promoting economic growth (Salleh Mohd. Nor and Manokaran 1994). During this period, urban centres grew rapidly, especially in the states of Selangor, Penang, and Johor, thanks to the development of the manufacturing industry in these states (Fauza Abd. Ghaffar 2000). In 1990, RDAs, the Land Development Authority, the Rubber Industries Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA), and the FELDA were established under the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development to centralize the development of regional planning initiatives under one ministry (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development 2007).

#### *National Development Plan (NDP), 1991–2000*

The Second Outline Perspective Plan (OPP2, 1991–2000) of the NDP began with the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–95). The NDP's objective was to achieve "balance in development growth of social and economic developments and strengthen science, technology and socio-economic development and environmental protection" (Economic Planning Unit 2004; Ministry of Rural and Regional Development 2007; Ragayah 2008). Overall, the NDP's policies were intended to integrate the previous achievements of OPP1, reduce social and economic imbalances (Fatimah and Mad Nasir 1997; Dayang-Affizzah and Muzafar Shah 2006), and lead Malaysia toward becoming an industrialized and developed country by 2020 (INTAN 1992; Evers et al. 2010).

Under the Sixth Malaysia Plan, the six regions were further enhanced through the development of infrastructural facilities and urban densities (Sulong Mohammad and Rahimah Abd. Aziz 1985). Meanwhile, the regional development strategy was maintained through the expanding of more social and physical infrastructure developments (Dayang-Affizzah and Muzafar Shah 2006). However, there was no allocation or strategy for new land-development schemes under this plan, except in the state of Sabah on Borneo (Salleh Mohd. Nor and Manokaran 1994).

In the following Five-Year Development Plan, growth in most states centred on the development of manufacturing, construction, and service sectors (Fauza Abd. Ghaffar 2000). This has led to increased economic productivity and less concentration on opening new land (Fatimah and

Mad Nasir 1997). Regional development in the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996–2000) was also focused on achieving balanced development among all states (Dayang-Affizzah and Muzafar Shah 2006).

Overall, the economic growth of the less developed states did not change under the implementation of the OPP2 relative compared to the growth seen during the 1970s and 1990s (Eskandarian and Ghalehtimouri 2011). According to Allauddin Anuar (2011), poverty and inequality rates in Malaysia have fallen since the 1970s, but hardcore poverty rates have remained the same since 2009. In contrast, although the implementation of the NDP was a continuous effort by the government to eradicate poverty, the available data show that the incidence of poverty has actually grown since the early 1990s (Ragayah 2008).

*National Vision Policy (NVP), 2001–10*

The five-year development plan was extended into the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001–5) under the Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3, 2001–10). The OPP3 introduced the National Vision Policy (NVP, 2001–10) to focus on “building a resilient and competitive nation” (Ibrahim Ngah 2010). Under the Eighth Malaysia Plan, the focus of development has shifted toward a knowledge-based economy in order to provide a stronger platform for the country’s transition into developed nation status (Musa Abu Hassan and Siti Zobidah Omar 2009). In addition, regional development was further planned to reduce economic and regional imbalances, eradicate poverty, and promote more socially and environmentally sustainable development (Ibrahim Ngah 2010). However, under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006–10), the focus was shifted to emphasize the services industry, so as to accelerate the country’s economy and thus lead to changes and new branding of regional development in Malaysia (Evers et al. 2010).

The implementation of the Ninth Malaysia Plan has included a regional development strategy to enhance existing regional economic development. Under this plan, the six regions were enhanced through additional power to control regional development and increased funding from both the federal government and government-linked companies. Five major regional economic developments were introduced:

- 1 The Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER, 2007–25), encompassing the states of Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, and North Perak
- 2 Iskandar Malaysia, formerly known as South Johor Economic Region (SJER) (2006–25), covering the area of south Johor
- 3 The East Coast Economic Corridor (2007–20), covering Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, and the north of Mersing district, Johor
- 4 The Sabah Development Corridor (SDC)
- 5 The Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE) in East Malaysia

The regional development strategy formulated under the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011–15) continued the aim of achieving developed country status by 2020. The strategy includes the implementation of cluster and economic corridor developments within the framework of New Economic Model (NEM) and the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) (Evers et al. 2010; Allauddin Anuar 2011). According to Evers et al. (2010), regional development plays an important role in promoting and controlling development in the states within each economic development corridor.

### **Overview of Regional Economic Development in Malaysia**

In developing countries, regional economic development is regarded as an important tool to boost national economic growth (Rondinelli 1990), create job opportunities, and increase the tax base (Danielson and Wolpert 1991). Several authors (e.g., Nijkamp and Abreu 2009) have identified regional economic development as a multidimensional concept with multidimensional factors. Stimson and Stough (2008) describe regional economic development as the outcome of a process of development of available regional resources and activities.

Regional economic development or regional economic corridors are defined by the Asian Development Bank (2011) as a well-defined geographic space of two countries within strategic borderlines with concentration to achieve positive benefits. Malecki (1991) summarizes regional economic development as a process derived by combining the quantitative and qualitative resources of a region's economy, while Blakely (1994) defines it resulting from the continuous engagement of a government or a society in the process of business and employment (Stimson and Stough 2008).

Regional development has played a significant role in accelerating development growth in Malaysia. Regional economic development began in Malaysia before independence, with the introduction of the Draft Development Plan of 1950 (Ghani Salleh 2000; Eskandarian and Ghalehtemouri 2011). Regional development was introduced to enhance economic development during the launch of the NEP (Ghani Salleh 2000; Ibrahim Ngah 2010). According to Zainul Bahrin (1989), the Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986–90) stated two major types of regional development in Malaysia: inter- and intra-regional development models and the establishment of areas under RDAs.

An example of regional development under the inter- and intra-regional development model is the development of the Northern, Central, Eastern, and Southern regions and of Johor, Sabah, and

Sarawak regions. The Southern region, Sabah, and Sarawak were designated as regions based on their large physical size, location, and different socio-economic activities. The Northern, Central, and Eastern regions, on the other hand, were established based on their similar resources and economic activities. The Northern region comprises the states of Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, and Perak, while the Central region consists of the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Melaka, and Negeri Sembilan, and the Eastern region comprises Pahang, Terengganu, and Kelantan states. According to Zainul Bahrin (1989), this regional development involves *multi-state* or *supra-state* regions.

The second type of regional development is a region governed by one of the seven RDAs (DARA, JENGKA, KETENGAH, KEJORA, KESEDAR, KEDA, PERDA). All regions are governed by the regional planning framework and operationalized by their respective RDAs.

#### *Involvement in ASEAN*

Malaysia is also an active participant in various regional economic developments at the level of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN; Asian Development Bank 2011). ASEAN, established in 1967, includes Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei became a member in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, the Lao PDR and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999 (Cuyvers 2002; Chia 1997). ASEAN was established in order to overcome the Asian economic crisis (Lai and Yap 2004) by reducing gaps in socio-economic development among member countries (Cuyvers 2002). ASEAN aims to achieve a respectable economic growth rate among countries in the developing world (Norazlina Abdullah, Zalina Abu Naim, and Yasmiza Long 2010).

One instrument to speed up economic development among ASEAN members is the promotion of growth areas or “growth triangles” (Cuyvers 2002; Hampton 2009). The concept of the growth triangle was developed to reduce regulatory boundaries so as to exploit economic resources and increase competitiveness by linking areas from three or more countries (EAAU 1995; Smith 1997; Ishak Yusof and Mohd Yusof 2003; Sparke et al. 2004; Dayang-Affizzah and Muzafar Shah 2006). A growth triangle is also defined as a sub-regional economic zone (Smith 1997; EAAU 1995), extended metropolitan region (Robbins and El-Khoury 2004), or economic territories (Fauza Abd. Ghaffar 2000). However, none of these definitions has any official status (EAAU 1995). According to Ishak Yusof and Mohd Yusof (2003), the growth triangle concept integrates the economies of regions to become regional economic development or cooperation.

Three growth triangles at the ASEAN level share the mutual aim of

enhancing existing economic growth and competitiveness (Fauza Abd. Ghaffar 2000). These growth triangles are described below.

### I.

#### Indonesia–Malaysia–Singapore Growth Triangle (IMS-GT)

One of the regional economic developments established under the ASEAN economy is the Indonesia–Malaysia–Singapore Growth Triangle (IMS-GT), also called SIJORI or JSR-GT (Chia 1997) and the Southern Growth Triangle (Fauza Abd. Ghaffar 2000). This growth triangle was first proposed by the prime minister of Singapore, Goh Chok Tong, in 1989 (EAAU 1995), integrates Singapore, the Riau Islands and West Sumatra of Indonesia, and the Malaysian state of Johor.

The formation of the IMS-GT is one of the better-known examples of catering to intensified urban size and fabric (Robbins and El-Khoury 2004). Dayang-Affizzah and Muzafar Shah (2006) argue that the IMS-GT development has been successful and leads to the formation of another subregional economic cooperation; Chia (1997) states that the future of the IMS-GT depends on continuous investment flows in Johor and the Riau province, and points out that the most important factor contributing to the development of IMS-GT is “geographical proximity and economic complementarity” (Chia 1997, 27).

### II.

#### Indonesia–Malaysia–Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT)

Another growth triangle involving Malaysia is the Indonesia–Malaysia–Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT). The IMT-GT covers an area and population larger than the IMS-GT, designed with five connectivity corridors (Asian Development Bank 2011). The IMT-GT, also known as the Northern Growth Triangle, was established based on the success of the IMS-GT (Chia 1997).

Similar to the IMS-GT, the IMT-GT was designed to encourage development within the growth triangle through the development of economic or connectivity corridors (Robbins and El-Khoury 2004; Banomyong, n.d.). Five connectivity corridors link the growth areas within this region:

1. Extended Songkhla–Penang–Medan Economic Corridor (Thailand–Malaysia–Indonesia)
2. The Straits of Melaka Economic Corridor (Malaysia)
3. Banda Aceh–Medan–Pekan baru–Palembang Economic Corridor (Indonesia)

4. Melaka–Dumai Economic Corridor (Malaysia–Indonesia)
5. Ranong–Phuket–Banda Aceh Economic Corridor (Thailand–Indonesia)

This approach was launched during the declaration of the IMT-GT flagship project in 2006 (Banomyong n.d.). The IMT-GT operates based on an agreement to share supporting industrial infrastructure and advanced information technology (Robbins and El-Khoury 2004).

### III.

#### Brunei–Indonesia–Malaysia–Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA)

The development of the BIMP-EAGA was inspired by the success of the IMS-GT (Dayang-Affizzah and Muzafar Shah 2006). Malaysia is a founding member of the BIMP–EAGA and IMT–GT growth triangles (Asian Development Bank 2011). The BIMP–EAGA, also known as the Eastern Growth Triangle, is another sub-regional economic cooperation within the ASEAN economy (Chia 1997).

In addition to the aim of promoting the development of Sabah and Sarawak (Dayang-Affizzah and Muzafar Shah 2006), BIMP–EAGA also has the goal of complementing growth centres within the regions to improve socio-economic status and living standards (Ishak Yussof and Mohd Yusof 2003). This growth triangle also aims to integrate the economic development of the participating countries (Ishak Yussof and Mohd Yusof 2003). A key element of the success of regional economic cooperation is creating linkages and facilitating the development of transportation infrastructure (Chia 1997).

### Conclusion

This article has focused on the evolution and development of regional planning in Malaysia and assessed the establishment of local and international regional economic developments in the country. Regional planning strategies in Malaysia are implemented throughout the long-term development plans (Wood 2005), which have reduced regional disparities in the country (Dani Salleh 2002) while at the same time closing income gaps among states (Mohamed Aslam and Asan Ali 2003). Although some researchers have found that regional development strategies in Malaysia were successfully achieved (Wood 2005; Mohamed Aslam and Asan Ali 2003), others have argued that the implementation of such strategies under the federative system were mostly unsuccessful because of the conflict of wealth distribution between states and regional authorities (Eskandarian and Ghalehtimouri 2011). However, according to

Snickers, Andersson, and Albegov (1982), the achievement of regional development planning differs depending on the pattern of development and growth of countries.

Our objective in this article was to describe the implementation of regional planning and development in Malaysia. The literature suggests that the achievement of regional planning and its development will differ depending on the pattern of development and growth. The literature review raised some areas of concern that can be improved in relation to regional planning and development in Malaysia, as discussed above. There is thus a significant need to study the impact of regional development in Malaysia. A study of the impacts of regional economic development will help to identify the issues and problems with current regional planning practices so that recommendations can be made to address them. However, the basis for regional planning remains the same: to promote competitiveness, create economic opportunities, and achieve balance in the socio-economic development of a country. Regional planning is one tool to achieve sustainable development in a country.

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Al-Hamad, M. 1980. Infant mortality in Kuwait: Differences between Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti population. Master’s thesis, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Dijkink, D. 1996. *National identity and geopolitical visions: Maps of pride and pain*. London: Routledge.

Elson, D. 1994. Uneven development and the textiles and clothing industry. In *Capitalism and development*, ed. L. Sklair, 189–210. London: Routledge.