BRILL *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication 2 (2009) 293–314* MEJCC brill.nl/mjcc

Digital Nomads: Between Homepages and Homelands[1]

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Abstract
For the last 60 years, we Palestinians have been living in an ever-diminishing space, constantly losing our landscape and our land to Israeli occupation. We live in an unstable space; our places are not concrete enough no matter how much cement and steel we put in them. Our paths are uncertain, risky and dangerous. We are never sure that we can get to our destination, and if we do get there, we are never sure that we can get back to where we started. Drawing on theoretical notions developed by Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, and Edward Said this paper examines how Palestinians can combat their loss of real physical space by resorting to new media and new technologies in the way of negotiating a sense of orientation in the world, and for constructing both personal and collective identities.

Keywords
Palestine; memory; space; virtual; internet; rhizome; occupation; dispossession; refugees

Introduction

Since 1947, with the founding of a homeland for Jews in Palestine, Palestinians have been living in an ever-diminishing space. This is a unique situation in the contemporary history of humanity; for 60 years, we have been subjugated to a situation where we constantly find ourselves in lesser geographies. My own personal life, like that of every other Palestinian, is a tale of perpetual loss of places. The place where I used to play when I was five had turned into a Jewish settlement by the time I was ten, suddenly becoming strange and forbidden. At ten years of age I could go to Jaffa or Gaza, but at 20

[1] Many thanks to A.F. for her generous support that allowed me to start this research project. I also want to thank Lila Abu Lughod, Zoe Druick, Kirsten McAllister, Gary MacCarron and Samir Gandesha for their valuable feedback and insights. Thanks to Laura Marks for the stipend she facilitated through her SSHRC grant.

 DOI 10.1163/187398509X12476683126707

Figure 1. Jewish settlement in the West Bank. Photo by Anna Baltzer.

I couldn't. At 30 I could go to Jerusalem; at 40 I couldn't., I was told not to love the refugee camp where I grew up and to never consider it home. The camp was transitory: something that appeared only to disappear – an abject landscape. I was born not in that landscape but in my parents' memories of their former homeland. I grew up repeatedly hearing the same stories about the glorious past, the lost paradise, the gardens, the harvest and the horses they owned.

Jewish settlements are not only places for living comfortably and cheaply; they are projected as images endowed with Biblical qualities. They grow and transform more and more of their surrounding lands, imagined as the future and the fate of all the land. This invented geography is governed by a double temporality as W.J.T. Mitchell writes; "a similar double temporality governs the mythic image of the holy landscape. It is both the place of origin and the utopian prospect of the future, always fleeting beyond the present" (Mitchell 2000: 213).

From the perspective of the image above of an Israeli settlement (Fig.1), this process of transformation is irreversible; a process whereby geography is subjected to time, and space is re-invented as a time image, suppressing the

spatial relationship between this piece of land and its surroundings. This hill near the West Bank village of Salfit is swallowed up, internalized and made intensive. This is deformed space to paraphrase Frederic Jameson in *The End of Temporality*, where he cautions us to "alert ourselves to the deformation of space when observed from the standpoint of time, of time when observed from the standpoint of space" (Jameson 2003: 698). But how can we approach space from the standpoint of time and time from the standpoint of space? What is this 'deformation' that Jameson refers to? Is it the collapse of the two onto each other? What are the consequences of space-less-ness, when people are left with no space to practice in and turn to places such as home, neighborhood, town and homeland? How can people survive their geography? And what becomes of memories when people find themselves living in the midst of unstable spaces that can appear or disappear as a result of extreme external forces?

As I seek to answer, or further complicate, these questions, my aim is to highlight the uniqueness of the Palestinian condition, not politically but existentially. This paper is part of a larger research project that focuses on the dynamics between space and memory, or more accurately between space-less-ness and memory. In *Tora Bora Cinema* (2008), I examined this phenomenon by focusing on Palestinian films and videos made between 1995 and 2005. In those works, I found the emergence of the paranoid Palestinian, the displaced, de-centered and space-less subject who, in order to survive, must not remember. Paranoia and amnesia emerge in those films as dynamics through which to negotiate existence under oppressive regimes of power. They are a survival technique through which one is able to combat loss of orientation resulting from the loss of land.

Here, I focus on the Internet as a virtual space hospitable to Palestinians as dispossessed people with a unique relation to both space and memory. On the surface, the Internet allows Palestinians to move in multiple directions simultaneously, bypassing the laws and logic of spatiotemporality. As with film, the Internet allows us to go places that are otherwise unreachable, but more than film, the Internet fosters the production of all kinds of communities that are scattered over discontinuous geographies. Most important for Palestinians is the fact that the Internet has allowed us, for the first time, to practice the otherwise prohibited: public collective remembrance. Nowhere in Israel or in the Arab world are Palestinians allowed to build museums, monuments or public displays bearing collective characteristics of our catastrophe. During the long years of occupation, Israel vigorously controlled all means of communication between dispersed Palestinian communities and between these communities and the rest of the world. Radio and TV stations, postal services, telephone

lines, faxes and radios were prohibited. Before the Internet, it was not possible for Palestinians in Palestine to have direct contact with Palestinians in Lebanon or Syria for example.

Before discussing the Internet, I first clarify the concepts of space and memory. At the core of my argument I posit an organic relationship between space and memory in the tradition of Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze who involve the present moment in their discourse of memory. Against the common notion that memory is the stuff of the past, they developed a framework that accomodates multiple temporalities. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concepts of the virtual, actual, rhizomatic and nomadic are key elements in this paper, and I am inspired by Ian Buchanan's reading of the Internet as 'rhizome' in *Deleuze and the Internet* (2007). Central to my discussion as well is Walter Benjamin's (1968) notion of 'constellation' from his thesis on the theory of history. Against Benjamin's 'constellation' I read Edward Said's (2000a) notion of the 'scene' as he developed it in his essay on Arabic prose after 1948. I am also driven by Edward Said's (1986: 6) visionary reflections on the necessecity of multiple voices and multiple visions for Palestinians: "the multifaceted vision is essential to any representation of us. Stateless, dispossessed, de-centered, we are frequently unable to speak the 'truth' of our experience or to make it heard." I use ideas and observations from other writers as well, all with the purpose of articulating yet another instant in the ongoing tragedy of a people who have been robbed of their space – completely. My concern here is not to show how informed Palestinians are about the Internet, nor to survey Internet usages and practices by Palestinians. Rather, my concerns here are theoritical as I seek to engage the Palestinian condition with contemporary debates in postcolonial, cultural and media studies. Because of its extremity the Palestinian condition offers an opportunity to re-examine and re-think many notions from colonial discourse and postcolonial theories. Studies on memory and trauma can benefit a great deal from the Palestinian experience. Studies on identity, community and nationhood can gain new insights into how these formations are reproduced and maintained under extreme measures of power and control. Media and communication students will find complex articulations for the power of the media, not only when media is owned and controlled by the powerful but when media is used by the disempowered and the dispossessed. We find in the Palestinian condition rich examples for how technology informs the reproduction of personal and collective identities in the 21st century.

In what follows I first expand on my understanding of memory, then offer a brief history of the diminishing space of Palestinians, and finally situate the Internet within these frameworks.

Memory

In *The Art of Memory,* Frances Yates explains how the spatial distribution of memory as it was envisioned in antiquity assumes that the 'artist of memory' can be in two or more different places at the same time; "We have to think of the ancient orator as moving in imagination through his memory building *whilst* he is making his speech, drawing from the memorized places the images he has placed on them" (Yates 1966: 3). This model shows us how codified and rigorous the art of memory can be, but it also offers a metaphorical, pictorial image for memory. The orator speaks in a theater in front of an audience, yet at the same time he enters a big house and moves around in it. He is instantly in two places, equally alive and forceful. In our imagination and our literature, humans have always attributed such capabilities to metaphysical beings such as Gods, spirits, demons and angels who populate the realms of the magical, the fantastic and the metaphysical. In contemporary terms one could say that the orator had a movie in his head, and when needed, he turned on an internal cinematic projector, very much like a lecturer today using audio-visual aids such as slides, graphs, videos and the Internet.

Memory allows us to be somewhere else at any time. Unlike other forms of travel, it doesn't require any locomotion; it is immaterial and totally within. It connects our material bodies with the immaterial rest. Bergson (1988) overcame the duality of idealism/materialism with memory. In his search for a bridge between body and spirit, between matter and image, between actual and virtual, he posited memory. Memory is all that immaterial other to which our bodies are connected, or can connect to at any time, all the time. Significantly, Bergson titled his book *Matter and Memory*, not Memory and Spirit, in which he writes; "with memory we are, in truth in the domain of spirit" (Bergson 1988: 240). In stories, religious fantasies, movies and everywhere else they exist, spirits defy time: they go from one place to another without getting old. They are not part of earth although they can engage with it; they are not subjugated to its laws. Earth, from the perspective of spirits, looks like one giant cinema, where spirits watch people come and go; they watch civilizations go by; they may interact or whatever but they remain outsiders. It is somehow telling that Bergson chose the word spirit in his overall description of memory. Spirits are living things, they are forceful, but in an immaterial form. Memory is not a meditative activity of the brain but a force of and on the body. Memory has a life of its own, not produced by the body, but interacts with and receives its vitality through it: "our past, on the contrary, is that which acts no longer but which might act, and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality"

(ibid: 240). Bergson locates memory at the surface of the body, that which connects the actual body with the virtual images of all other bodies. The surface of the body is what distinguishes between the exterior and interior, between a person and the world around them. Memory "retains something of its virtuality if, being a present state, it were not also something which stands out distinct from the present, we should never know it for a memory" (ibid: 134). Memory never acts as a "reservoir of images" (ibid: 237). The orator doesn't go inside the house to recover memory; it is memory that takes him from the theater to the house, because memory is already there, and everywhere;

> Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act *sui generis* by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past - a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera (ibid: 134).

Gilles Deleuze expands on Bergson's theory and develops it as a theory of the virtual and the actual. He suggests that memory is not an actual image "which forms after the object has been perceived, but a virtual image coexisting with the actual perception of the object. Memory is a virtual image contemporary with the actual object, its double, its 'mirror image'" (Deleuze 2002: 150). As for Bergson, for Deleuze memory is a present, contemporary operation that organizes the body's relation with the external world. In fact Deleuze posits memory at the split of time between past and present; he writes, "This distinction between the virtual and the actual corresponds to the most fundamental split in time, that is to say, the differentiation of its passage into two great jets, the passing of the present and the preservation of the past" (ibid: 151). Where Bergson locates memory on the surface of the body, in our sensory-motor schemata, Deleuze situates it in a "hodological space," a concept of space he borrows from German psychologist Kurt Lewin. In *Cinema 2,* Deleuze writes: "we simply note that the sensory-motor schemata is concretely located in a hodological space, which is defined by a field of forces, oppositions and tensions between these forces" (Deleuze 1989: 127). Lewin's notion of 'hodological space' or 'space of the path' as J.F. Brown (1936) explains was developed to contrast Euclidean space, where the latter is concerned with measurement of distance crossed from point A to point B and the former, which is multidimensional, composed of regions not points, is concerned with paths crossed, not distances measured. Lewin posited an obstacle in the Euclidean line between points A and B, and then re-imagined the space from the perspective of the person who is trying to bypass the obstacle and reach point B. Space ceases to be the physical space and becomes 'conceptual and social.' Deleuze

argues that the collapse of hodological space (one's inability to reach or to follow a path) results in the collapse of sensory-motor schemata, which can result in disorientation, disarticulation, and loss of memory. Under such conditions the organic relationship between the virtual and the actual collapses. When I leave my home and I cannot go back to it, and when I leave my city and I cannot go back to it, and when I leave my country and I cannot go back to it, I am a man with no path.

This moment when legal and causal connections fail to take me back, I resort to everything else. I leap, invade, imagine, fantasize and remember. I take any route possible. When the organic fails, a crystalline regime of image takes over. Walter Benjamin (1968) calls this moment 'constellation,' when different images are connected non-causally or chronologically. Benjamin, writing in the aftermath of fascism and Nazism, did not think of history as a progression of events in an "empty and homogeneous time" (Benjamin 1968: 260) that unfolds sequentially like "rosary beads;" instead, Benjamin conceived of the historian as "he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now'" (ibid: 260-61). The co-existence of different temporalities in Benjamin's conception of history challenges the progressive narrative of history where time is derived from movement and actions, and always classified between past and present. Benjamin confronts history with memory. If history unfolds like rosary beads, memory is a "leap in the open air of history" (ibid*:* 261).

Above, I outline theoretical notions that conceive memory as something that is malleable, inventive and discursive, and as located in a hodological space where the loss or collapse of which results in the collapse or dysfunction of memory. If we accept that memory is not an innate process and resides neither in our bodies nor in our brains but on the surface between our bodies and the world, then it becomes all the more agreeable to argue that, to a large extent, our memory is shaped by external forces such as all the other bodies out there, the objects and the mediums through which we come into contact with those memories, and the discourses and forces that are at play. Memory is not to be understood as one homogeneous quality that runs similarly for all people, but as Marita Sturken writes, "the forms remembrance takes indicate the status of memory within a given culture" (1997: 44). Repetition, recollection, remembrance are only some of the ways in which we practice memory where different disciplines emphasize or focus on different practices. In postcolonial debates on memory, the concerns seem to be focused on remembrance and its vicissitudes, and the ways in which forms of remembrance inform people's sense of identity as a collectivity or a nation.

Space

Figure 2, taken from an Israeli anti-occupation website, tells a good deal of the story that I try to convey here: the paradox of shrinking space and growing population. In 1922, the first British census of Palestine recorded a total population of 757,182, with 11 percent of Jews owning around 3 percent of the land (PASSIA 2007). The 1931 census recorded a population of 1.04 million with 16 percent Jews. The flow of Jewish immigration to Palestine raised the figure to 30 percent by 1947, yet owning less than 7% of the land. In 1947 the United Nations General Assembly voted to partition Palestine, giving 56% of the land to a Jewish State and the remaining 43% to the Palestinians. In 1948 Jewish militias declared war and captured over 77 percent of Palestine. The first and foremost task of the newly founded Israel was to re-invent Palestine as a Biblical landscape, ancient and empty, by eradicating all objects and images that might refer to those who had left. A kind of purification took place, a ritualistic destruction that, in the first few months took the lives of over 400 villages and towns that were completely erased.[2]

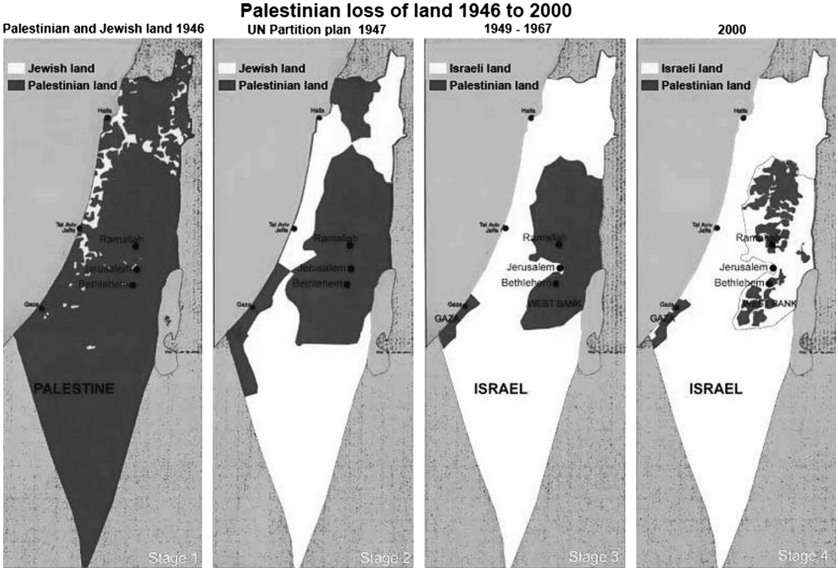

Figure 2. Shrinking Palestine. Source: Kibush.

[2] Israeli historian Benny Morris (1987) puts the number at 380 villages while Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi (1992) puts the number at 421.

From 1948 until 1966, Palestinians who remained in Israel (between 150,000 and 200,000) were cut off from any contact with Palestinians and Arabs around them. A special military system was established to administer their affairs, making sure that they didn't express or exhibit anything Palestinian. They needed military permits to leave their towns. In education and in cultural policies, Israel put conscious and serious efforts into making Palestinians forget. Names of towns and villages were changed, and meanings of landmarks and sacred places were re-invented and anchored in a Jewish context. Hebrew became the official language taught in schools.

Generally speaking, Israelis wanted to re-invent Palestinians who remained as a people with no memory. Anthropologist Sharif Kana'neh said to me in a filmed interview in 2004: "Israel wanted to create an amnesic Arab, who is not Israeli and not Palestinian." This amnesic Palestinian is best described in Emil Habiby's character Saïd the Pessoptimist, in the novel *The Secret Life of Said the Pessoptimist* (1974). Only after 1967, with the annexation of the remaining territories were those Palestinians able to re-connect with other Palestinians. Many of the over 500,000 now-refugees, were able to go back and look at their former homes. I remember in the early 1970s, in the Al-Jalazon refugee camp where I grew up, my father took us on our first family trip to his village Al-Safriyeh. I remember the house and the orchard. We didn't go inside. I still remember my father's face and his tears, and the Jewish woman who was trying to comfort him with a basket of oranges. All summer, every summer, our refugee camp like every other refugee camp would get busy organizing those 'joyful family trips' as posters announced them then. For kids like me, those trips were simultaneously the most beautiful and the saddest moments in my life. To look at people standing in front of their former homes like strangers, to hear their cries and their prayers, shattered my heart.

The 1967 war was the single most important event after the *Nakba* that allowed Palestinians to nurture their memories of, and desires for, the lost paradise. A non-stop flow of images and narratives were constantly emerging from encounters between people and their former homes and towns. Sa'di and Abu-Lughod reflect on the moment of encounter between refugees and their former homes:

> We have in the grandfather's house an instance of a site to which memory attaches, one of the kinds of objects that Pierre Nora (1989) famously refers to as "les lieux de memoir." We have in the second-generation "return" to the site of the parents' and grandparents' former life, the imaginative workings of "postmemory" provoked by a historical family photograph, we have setting in the car outside, the traumatized survivor who cannot bear to face the violators of her presence… finally we have […] the humbling confrontation with the dominant narrative of the victor, in which an alternative truth cannot be mumbled (Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007: 2).

In 1993, Israel acknowledged some kind of Palestinian existence and agreed to negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). They started by negotiating on some 20% of the 23% of Palestine that was occupied in 1967. In 2000, the second Intifada broke out, resulting in massive Israeli destruction of Palestinian authority infrastructure, transforming the West Bank and Gaza into isolated ghettos. More land was taken for military purposes, settlements, and bypass roads. In 2002 Israel started constructing a 25-foot high concrete wall that divided the West Bank into five prisons, and Gaza into one big prison, all surrounded with high concrete slabs, trenches, barbed wire, "buffer zones," electrified fencing, numerous watch towers, thermal imaging video cameras, sniper towers and roads for patrol vehicles. The wall reduced that 23% of Palestine down to 12%. The wall is the ultimate measure of control and confinement of Palestinians in minimal spaces, separating Palestinians from Israelis and from each other.

In May 2007, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the occupied Palestinian territories, a mission set up by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), published a number of documents[3] detailing Israeli methods and policies obstructing movement and confining people to smaller areas. One of the documents contains 268 pages of detailed information with photographs of the various checkpoints, barriers, roadblocks, trenches and earth mounds, which totaled 539 structures in 2007. The document is complemented with a PowerPoint presentation which includes a roadmap legend that is unlike any other (Fig. 3). Here, all signs for roads and paths are replaced with their effacement. This is a legend for a map that leads to nowhere, a map without routes, paths, or roads – ultimately a map that points to no geographical, habitual or social spaces. This is a legend for a space that is totally striated; this legend points to no hodological space, but to the obstacle and only the obstacle.

By the end of 2006, Palestinians globally numbered over 10 million, with 3.95 million living in the West Bank and Gaza, 1.2 million in Israel, 2.7 million in Jordan, 1.6 million in other Arab countries and around 0.6 million in other foreign countries (PCBS 2006).[4] Of the total population, approximately 70% are refugees and some 450,000 are internally displaced persons (Badil 2007).[5] All along, Israel has adopted a strategy of segregating these

[3] These documents are available online at www.ocha.org (January 2008).

[4] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Palestine in Figures, 2006, www.pcbs.gov.ps (December 2007).

[5] Badil Resource Center for Residency and Refugees Rights, 1948-2000, 60 Years of the Palestinian Nakba, Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. 2006. www.badil.org (December 2007).

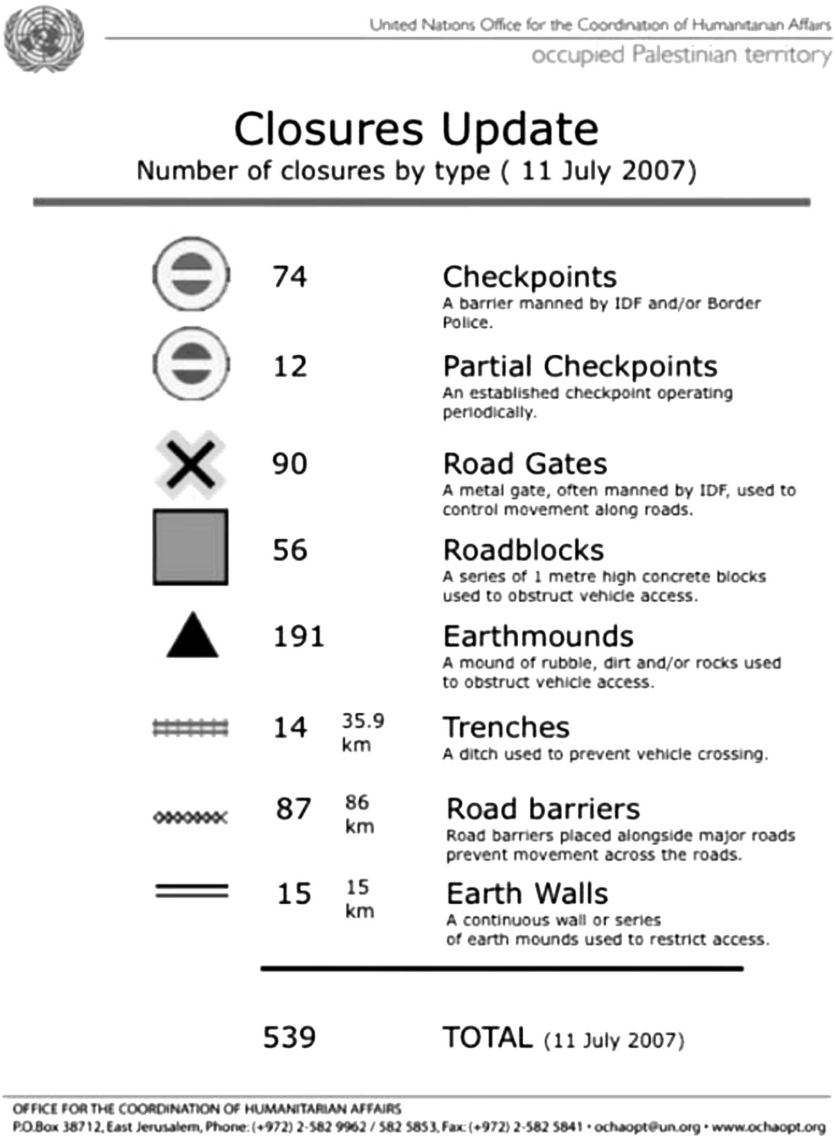

Figure 3. Closure Map Legend. Source: OCHA.

communities and exercising utmost control over their access to Palestine and to each other.

I must pause here to stress not to simply bear in mind an image of the Palestinian as an imprisoned one who cannot move. While this image is

true, it doesn't convey the whole picture. Ultimately, Palestinians are to be squeezed out of Palestine. But those not squeezed out, are crushed in. There are at least two kinds of Palestinians: those who are out there with no point of return, no center, struggling in refugee camps or in transit as refugees and exiles – those Palestinians of whom poet Mahmoud Darwish says "we travel like all people, but we return to nothing" (2003: 11). The other Palestinians are those in the walled and gated ghettos, with no horizon, no extension, and no movement. So there are those constantly on the move – 'transitory' as Said described them – and those who are trapped and immobile. This significantly diversifies the experiences of dislocation and dispossession as two different locations from where to relate or to orientate, oneself in the world.

No matter how many figures, facts, maps or metaphors I attach to my description of the situation, it never feels good enough. The amount of cruelty embedded in this process makes the experience indescribable. There is no master narrative or grand image that could gather the story or simplify it for me; the moment I speak, I'll be thinking of the things I am not speaking of. Palestinians' collective experience has constituted, I believe, what Benedict Anderson calls a "mode of apprehending the world [which] more than anything else, made it possible to 'think' the nation" (Anderson 1991: 22). In the words of Edward Said,

> To be sure no single Palestinian can be said to feel what most other Palestinians feel: Ours has been too various and scattered a fate for that sort of correspondence. But there is no doubt that we do in fact form a community, if at heart a community built on suffering and exile (1986: 5).

The Internet

In his examination of Arab prose after 1948, Said identifies the 'scene' as the main compositional unit, evocative of a scene in a film. Said asserts that the connection between scenes is "tenuous" with a tendency "to episodism, and the repetition of scenes, as if rhythmic succession of scenes can become a substitute for quasi-organic continuity (Said 2000a: 49). In his commentary on the quintessential Palestinian novel, Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* (1962), Said reveals the multi-layers of time enfolded in the novel's scenes:

> This passage is one of the numerous scenes into which the work is divided. In almost everyone, the present, temporally speaking, is unstable and seems subject to echoes from the past, to synaesthesia as sight gives way to sound, or smell and as one sense interweaves with another, to a combination of defensiveness

> against the harsh present and the protection of some particularly cherished fragment of the past (ibid: 52).

The present is the key element of the scene, and what distinguishes the present for Palestinians is dispossession and exile. The scene is the '"irreducible form of the present" (ibid: 49) that has to be articulated with the resources of language and vision. The scene is a temporal image, space seen from the perspective of time, deformed space, or space that does not follow the spatiotemporal logic, a space that is distributed horizontally. Said's 'scene' is a time-image of space: non-linear, non-chronological, episodic, repetitive, guaranteeing actuality, defying death and the void – a sight for struggle, substituting organic continuity. In cinema, Deleuze proposes the emergence of the "crystalline regime of image" as a substitute for the collapse of the "organic regime of image" in the aftermath of the Second World War, where space in the ruined cities of Europe was transformed from hodological spaces into "any-spaces-whatever" (Deleuze 1989: xi). He examines this space-less-ness, or the loss of spatial orientation in films that became dominated by time-images rather than movement images, where the real is "no longer represented or reproduced but aimed at," and where "the sequence shot tended to replace the montage of representation" (*ibid*: 1).

Said's 'scene,' Benjamin's 'constellation' and Deleuze's 'sequence' are traumatic time-images of space that are produced in the aftermath of death, destruction and dispossession. Where can such deformed images of space live? What kind of space can they occupy? What kind of spatiotemporalities can accommodate such discontinuities and ruptures? Where do people like this live? 'Scene' 'constellation' and 'sequence' inhabit literary, philosophical and cinematic spaces, but outside of these imaginary possibilities, are there real ones out there? There is the prison (prisoners describe themselves as 'doing time;' this is time seen from the perspective of space) and there is the mental hospital (no need for any coordination between space and time). There is also exile and migration that require daily negotiations. These are the kinds of accommodations or possibilities provided for the dispossessed, by the dominant power that occupied and striated the space.

I propose the Internet as a spatial model that allows for the existence and interaction of such discontinued lives. As Paul Basu writes, "the internet has multiple temporal and spatial orderings" (Basu 2007: 95). The Internet allows us to become the authors of, and players in, those "scenes and sequences." The Internet is the medium *par-excellence* that allows dispossessed people the possibility for such living. First Nation scholar Katarina Soukup explains how in the process of appropriating new technologies by Inuit artists, when time came to chose an Inuktitut word for the Internet, the Official Languages

Commissioner chose the word *Ikiaqqivik,* which translates into "traveling through layers." She writes, "The word comes from the concept describing what a shaman does when asked to find out about living or deceased relatives or where animals disappeared to: travel across time and space to find answers" (Soukup 2006: 239).

In *Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari develop the concept of the rhizome as a spatial model through which to conceive phenomena in multiplicities. They mention that the rhizome connects any point to any point. It is composed not of units but of dimensions; it has neither beginning nor end; it is not an object of reproduction; it functions by expansion and conquest; unlike graphic arts, photography or tracing, it pertains to a map. A rhizome is made of plateaus, and a plateau is always at the middle, not at the beginning or the end. A rhizome is associated with short-term memory as opposed to history: "History is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads. What is lacking is a Nomadology, the opposite of a history" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 23). Buchanan (2007) reads the Internet against each of these principles to reach the conclusion that the Internet is very much like a rhizome. The Internet connects any point to any other point; it is composed of dimensions and thus cannot be reduced to one or multiple; it is a-centered and operates by variation, expansion, and offshoots, not by reproduction.

At the heart of the rhizome is what Deleuze calls nomadology. Nomadology is a type of spatial existence where one does not posses and does not need to possess land and geographies in order to secure movement. Nomadology is smooth space, void of checkpoints, walls, gates, and roads. In smooth space there are no points, but only relays in a trajectory. There are no roads, but paths; one moves from point A to point B only to leave point B behind. It is tempting to project this model on the Palestinians in terms of their relationship to land, geography and space in general. Deleuze explains nomadology through recourse to the figure of the migrant. He warns us against thinking of migrants as nomads:

> The nomad is not at all the same as the migrant; for the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen, or not well localized. But the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity; in principle, points for him are relays along a trajectory. Nomads and migrants can mix in many ways, or form a common aggregate; their causes and conditions are no less distinct for that (1987: 380).

Deleuze doesn't take the image of the migrant any further in his discussion but continues with the nomad leaving us with many questions about the

migrant. Is he the modern image of the nomad? Why would Deleuze warn us that "the nomad is not at all the same as the migrant," if this was not the very possibility that such conflation would take place? There is room here to project not only Palestinians but every other dispossessed or displaced group. In the age of modern warfare, globalization, imperialism, and corporate greed, we live in a world with many casualties, full of refugees and exiles. As for us Palestinians, we provide a unique example in this regard. We are more than migrants for we are dispossessed as well, a people with no geography to return to. Palestinians are not nomads, but they are more than migrants: they are refugees, exiles, deportees, martyrs, or in prison. They combine modes of existence of 'being there but not really being there.' For nomads, land ceases to be land; it becomes a ground that supports them; for Palestinians, land ceases to be either.

Palestinians possess principal characteristics of the nomads, they "mix with them in many ways" despite differences in causes and conditions. It is also tempting to think of Palestinians as nomads because, and due to, their resistance and revolution they revive a nomadic potential;

> Each time there is an operation against the State, insubordination, rioting, guerrilla warfare, or revolution as act - it can be said that a war machine has revived, that a new nomadic potential has appeared, accompanied by the reconstitution of a smooth space or a manner of being in space as though it were smooth" (ibid: 386).

Rhizomatic spaces are hospitable to nomadic thoughts and forces; this is how I think of the Internet as hospitable to Palestinians. Rhizomatic and nomadic: a perspective situated outside of the whole depressing terminology that has become disabling when talking about the Zionist colonization of Palestine.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to map out the various Internet practices by Palestinians given the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of websites run by, for, or about Palestinians. In what follows I focus exclusively on a website which serves as a good example of Palestinian Internet use that merges the theories above. *www.Palestineremembered.com* was initiated in the diaspora in 2000 and illustrates the lively and inhabitable aspects of the Internet. I can never forget the first time I visited the website: I encountered an image of my father taken before 1948, back in his village with the football team (Fig. 4). I wondered about the person who uploaded this photograph; I signed in and wrote a comment that my father was in the picture. I wanted to share whatever stories there were around this photograph, and, I had so many questions: Did they play a game that day? With whom? Who are those people not wearing shorts – my father being one of them? There is only one

Figure 4. Al-Safriyeh, my father in 1940. Source: www.palestineremembered.com

man wearing the *Tarbush*; and who was he? Was he an official? What about the man in the suit? Where did these people end up?

As days went, comments were posted. One person identified the person on the far right as Ustaz Mahmoud Nofal, "the biggest merchant in *Al-Sham"* (greater Syria). Another wrote that he was delighted to see a picture of his grandfather, while another filled in the names of the people. The man wearing *Tarbush* is the schoolteacher. The Arabic writing says "Sports Club, Al-Safreyah 1940." The English typewritten script reads "Safria village palesti" (the word is incomplete). The Arabic however is written on a piece of paper that was attached to the picture, which tells me that this is a picture of the picture. Those who wrote those words on the picture, using different methods, were anchoring the image in time and place. The photograph with the writings on it, and the photograph of the photograph comprise a 'scene' or a 'constellation' or a time-image of that village and those people. This is the kind of multiplicity that resists totalizing narratives; no one comment is more truthful or grander than the others. Every piece of writing or inscription adds another dimension without reducing one to the other. They all exist horizontally – equally present, equally forceful.

Figure 5. Fleeing Jaffa in 1948. Source: www.palestineremembered.com

Every photograph posted on www.palestineremembered.com has many stories. It is only in this spatial distribution that one is able to equally experience all of the stories distinctively and interactively. For example, the photographer of Fig. 5 is un-named/un-known; the only information given mentions that the photograph was taken on the day people in Jaffa were fleeing the city. Underneath the picture I read these two comments:

> It all began on Saturday May 1st 1948 in the morning. I left with my father to the Souk, for the next day it was Easter. We met some soldiers from the Salvation Army who told us that all the souks were closed and no need to go further. We returned and found to our surprise almost all our neighbors standing on their doors with their suitcases in hand. There were two ships 'waiting' in the port, they said, and it is a matter of 15 days and we will be back. So, within minutes we made up our mind and left to the port. The boats you see in this picture are lifting Jaffa residents from the quay to the ships waiting some 600 meters far in the sea. You would not believe if I tell you that 24 hours ago, we haven't got the slightest idea of leaving our country.[6]

[6] (Salim El Far, 2007, retrieved January 3, 2008 http://www.palestineremembered.com/Jaffa/Jaffa/Picture1253.html (January, 2008).

And the second entry:

> In this picture, my late Grandmother Mamdoha Al Dajani witnessed a woman dropped her infant off the boat by mistake thinking that it was her Jewelry box. After she realized the mistake and Boat would not go back, the poor woman lost her mind. Sharks were in the water catching anything alive on that sad day.[7]

These people encountered this picture the way I encountered my father's: revisited by the horrors of the present moment through an image from the past. Do these two people know each other? Did they know each other then? What is it that truly connects these two people at this instant? Is it the fact that they came from the same city before 1948? Is it their memory of the event? Is it the picture? Or is it the website that connected them and brought their stories together? Did they exchange emails and stories?

The website states its purpose as wanting to "create an easy medium" for refugees to communicate and share. This is a good example of "making memory public." The website also functions as a "memory site" making it possible for people to narrate and inscribe, allowing them to be in a scene, for "to be in a scene is to displace extinction, to substitute life for the void. Thus the very act of telling, narrating, uttering, guarantees actuality" (Said 2000a: 50).

The site also enables people to re-exercise control, survey, conquer and reclaim. On the main page there is a section for 'Satellite Views' where Google Earth is used to point to locations in Israel. When the mouse rolls over any of the colored dots, a pop-up little screen appears with what is usually an old photograph for that place, with information in Arabic and English conveying the original Arabic name of the place, pre-1948 (Fig. 6). Whatever we call this act, it is in many ways an act of return – not visiting, but re-mapping and re-conquering the place.

Another example is in the way old and new pictures are put together in no particular order. For Jafa, Acre, Jerusalem and most other cities you will find pictures from before 1948 next to ones that are very recent. This assemblage of pictures tells us that the concern here is not only with the past but with the present and the future as well. The old pictures (before 1948) destabilize the relative peace and quietness of the new ones bringing memory to bear upon them. The connection between the two pictures can only be made by observers whose memories and histories are implicated, for whom the two pictures produce tension, resistance, and subversion. To display these photographs is akin to the act of photographing which, as Susan Sontag puts it "to photograph is

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[7] online entry by Hosam Danjani at http://www.palestineremembered.com/Jaffa/Jaffa/Picture1253.html.

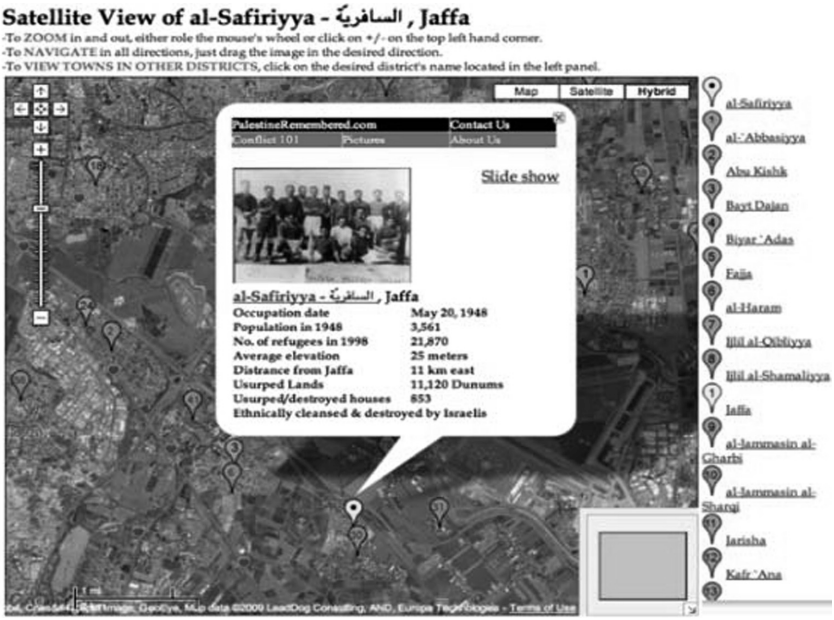

Figure 6. Re-conquering Palestine. Still from www.palestineremembered.com

to appropriate the thing photographed" (1973: 2) In fact, Sontag goes further to suggest that photographs "help people take possession of space in which they are insecure" (Ibid: 6). Although she directs this notion towards 'tourism photography', I think that her observation is applicable to other situations where ambivalence marks one's relation to space, when one is there but not really there. The fervent way in which these photographs are uploaded and displayed by various visitors is an act of memorializing, of providing evidence and, of connecting the past with the present, or as Sontag puts it; "people robbed of their past seem to make the most fervent picture takers" (ibid: 7).

This site, like many other Palestinian websites, provides Palestinians with a place where they can practice collective remembrance. The fact that we've lost our homeland to the Jewish people in the aftermath of Nazism stands out as a unique condition that marks our experience from any other colonial or settler experience in modern history. Our status as victims is challenged and overshadowed by our oppressor's victimhood, and so our memories are relentlessly challenged and contested by their memories. But it is not only in and by Israel that Palestinian forms of remembrance are denied and resisted; in western media and academia too one can find vivid examples of how difficult it is for Palestinian memory to gain mere acknowledgment – especially when the topic

is memory and trauma, where the Holocaust stands as a universal symbol for pain and suffering, and almost automatically displaces and replaces the *Nakba.* The situation is no different in the Arab world. Palestinian forms of remembrance are conditioned to this or that regime. In his photo-essay book *After the Last Sky*, Edward Said gives a good example. In 1983 he was commissioned as a consultant by the United Nations for its conference on the question of Palestine. He commissioned Swiss photographer John Mohr to take photographs of Palestinians in various places:

> I suggested that photographs of Palestinians be hung in the entrance hall to the main conference site in Geneva. … Mohr left on a special UN sponsored trip to the Near East. The photographs he brought back were indeed wonderful; the official response, however, was puzzling and, to someone with a taste of irony, exquisite. You can hang them up, we were told, but no writing can be displayed with them. No legends, no explanations (1986: 3).

The prohibition to write, Said explains, was raised by Arab member states hosting Palestinian refugees wanting to keep the Palestinians confined within a certain image that they, not the Palestinians, could control. Caption and text would have turned those photographs from "portraits" into "imagetext" in the words of W.J.T. Mitchell "a double coded system of mental storage and retrieval" (1994: 192).[8] The inclusion of text would have turned the photographs from absent presence into present absence, since they were contemporary rather than archival photographs. They were images from the present that was being denied any connection with the past. The writings would have inserted these photographs into the past, turning them from mere traces of people and refugees into a map of displacement and dispossession.

Laleh Khalil's (2005) study on places of memory and mourning in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon illustrates the difficulty, if not the near impossibility, of collective remembrance by Palestinians in politically contested post-Civil War Lebanon. Despite the massacres, expulsions, and violence exacted upon Palestinians in Lebanon, there are no monuments or commemorative signs or plaques at those sites; "The absence of monuments in places one would expect—for example, on massacre sites—reveals extant contentions that silence particular commemorative narratives in the context of the uneasy post–civil war power relations in Lebanon (Laleh Khalil 2005: 38). Khalili explores what she calls the "quotidian" memory places like alleyways, cellars, and lonely water taps. Nurseries, schools, and hospitals were turned

[8] Mariana Hirsch makes use of Mitchell's observation in her reading of *Maus* by Art Spiegelman.

into gravesites. These 'quotidian' places of memory attest to the imaginative powers of collective remembrance. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan discuss in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century,* how fiction, popular theater, and poetry "played critical role in keeping collective memory alive in a society where the writing of history was a routine operation dedicated to the glorification of the regime" (2000: 7). I want to add the Internet to these imaginative and fictional powers of collective remembrance.

By way of conclusion, I want to add that the Internet empowers younger generations of Palestinians to challenge the stagnation and rigidity of our traditional political powers. Our politics have suffered thus far from the glorification of God and gun. It is going to take time and a range of forces to change this condition and develop a cultural politics of resistance. The Internet is one such force that allows younger people, women, and desperate refugees to raise their voices and to form communities not only to stress their dilemma, but to challenge traditional political parties and to influence change.

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