

# The Future of Palestinian Identity



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# A CRISIS OF IDENTITY: PALESTINIAN WOMEN, MEMORY AND DISSENT

MARIA HOLT\*

## Introduction

In February last year, Amina<sup>1</sup>, a woman in her late 50s, told me the story of how her family left Palestine in 1948. Her mother was cooking at the stove, she said, when enemy soldiers entered their home and took the children out. Her mother left the food on the stove, but a soldier told her to turn it off and to bring mattresses to sleep outside. She asked where they would go, and he replied that they would return. They came to Beirut, she said, where they stayed in a mosque that was divided by mattresses as walls. After that, they went to Shatila and lived in tents. There were storms, so people moved closer together to protect themselves, and they started to build tin walls<sup>2</sup>. Amina's father was later murdered in the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre. She now lives in the Ain el-Hilwe refugee camp in southern Lebanon. Her story encapsulates the lack of choice or safety for families forced from their homes and turned into refugees and also the necessity of survival, not only of individuals but also of the Palestinians as a national entity. In this paper, in light of the perceived "crisis of identity", I will look at how Palestinian women, both in Palestine itself and in the diaspora, contribute to the project of identity construction and preservation.

In the face of escalating hopelessness, in terms of living conditions and future prospects for peace and security, Palestinian women adopt various modes of survival to protect themselves and their children. They confront efforts to negate their identity through memory, solidarity and dissent. In 2006-2007, I conducted research with Palestinian refugee women in

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\* Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster.

<sup>1</sup> All names of women interviewees in this paper are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview, Ain el-Hilwe camp, Sidon, 3 February 2007.

Lebanon and also with women refugees and non-refugees in the West Bank<sup>1</sup>, and in my paper I will discuss how ways of articulating “identity” have changed over time and the effects women have had on expressions of national identity. I will focus, firstly, on what identity means for Palestinian women and next on what Mahmoud Darwish calls the “blessings of memory”,<sup>2</sup> the remarkable stories told by women about their life histories. Thirdly, I will focus on shared experiences of suffering, in exile and under occupation and, in particular, on the role of morality and modes of resistance and, finally, on the many ways in which women challenge adversity in order to create a more tolerable future for themselves and their families. By contrasting what Ted Swedenburg describes as “official Palestinian nationalism”<sup>3</sup> with women’s subtle subversion of nationalist discourse, I will argue that the shape of Palestinian identity is changing to accommodate more fluid elements of belonging.

## Meanings of National Identity for Women

I will start by trying to define “identity” and go on to examine various aspects of Palestinian identity and how women enact notions of identity construction and preservation. Palestinian national identity has been shattered and demoralized, and is now associated with shame, victimization, and failure. One could argue, however, that it was never an identity wholeheartedly shared by all members of the community. Traditionally, men have led the way in constructing ideologies and going into battle; women have tended to support male initiatives with varying degrees of enthusiasm. There is abundant literature on the question of identity, much of it relevant to the Palestinian case. Identity can be considered either in terms of the individual or the group. However, as Bowman remarks, although Palestinians’ “memories of a common

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<sup>1</sup> My research on Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon was funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council; my research on women and Islamic resistance movements in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories was funded by the United States Institute of Peace.

<sup>2</sup> Darwish, Mahmoud, *Memory for Forgetfulness. August, Beirut, 1982* (translated from the Arabic by Ibrahim Muhawi), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p.16.

<sup>3</sup> Swedenburg, Ted, “Popular Memory and the Palestinian National Past”, in Jay O’Brien and William Roseberry, editors, *Gold Ages, Dark Ages: Imagining the Past in Anthropology and History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, p.175.



origin...give them a ground, and a symbolic repertoire, for identity, it is their experiences which...provide references for those symbols and a landscape for that ground".<sup>1</sup> Some scholars claim that feelings of a distinct national identity for Palestinians started to take shape in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in response to the encroachment of political Zionism in Palestine and the influence of nationalist ideologies elsewhere. Sari Hanafi, however, argues that, although "the construction of Palestinian identity began after the establishment of the British Mandate in Palestine, the crystallization of this identity...is a relatively recent phenomenon".<sup>2</sup> But what exactly is meant by "identity" in this context? One imagines it is linked to feelings of belonging and community, an attachment to the land. It became an identity rooted in traumatic experience. Caught between the competing narratives of Jewish entitlement and Arab self-determination, Palestinian national identity developed characteristics of struggle, resistance and defeat. It was a response to hurt and disappointment.

After 1948 and the creation of the Israeli state, Palestinian national identity came to be seen as somehow shameful or problematic. In response, Palestinians began to create a narrative of heroism. It contained, in Hobsbawm's words, an "element of artefact [and] invention...which enters into the making of nations".<sup>3</sup> Palestinians were determined to demonstrate that the Palestinian people as a unique national entity were not going to disappear. Edward Said has written that exiles "are cut off from their roots, their land, their past... [They] feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as a part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people".<sup>4</sup>

After the defeat of 1982, however, a counter-narrative began to be articulated. Although it acknowledged Palestinian victimization, it also incorporated qualities of survival and ways of fighting back that did not

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<sup>1</sup> Bowman, Glen, "Tales of the Lost Land: Palestinian Identity and the Formation of Nationalist Consciousness", in Carter, Erica, James Donald and Judith Squires, editors, *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993, p.95.

<sup>2</sup> Hanafi, Sari, "Rethinking the Palestinians Abroad as a Diaspora: The Relationship Between the Diaspora and the Palestinian Territories", in Levy, Andre and Alex Weingrod, editors, *Homelands and Diasporas: Holy Lands and Other Places*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, p.112.

<sup>3</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", in Hobsbawm and Ranger, editors, *The Invention of Tradition*, p.6.

<sup>4</sup> Said, Edward, "Reflections on Exile", in Ferguson, Russell, Martha Gever, Trinh T Minh-ha and Cornel West, editors, *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1990, p.360.

necessarily resort to armed force. It is here, I think, that we can begin to appreciate the more subtle contributions made by women. Various authors have noted the absence of women's voices in the construction of the national narrative.<sup>1</sup> Swedenburg, for example, speaks of men as "the primary authorities...on local history and public affairs in general".<sup>2</sup> Palestinian women's memories "have rarely found a place"<sup>3</sup> and, therefore, their voices tend to be excluded, their concerns often minimized or disregarded altogether. One concludes, therefore, that communal identity is largely a male construct with little reference to the particular experiences of women.

While Palestinian women certainly played a full part in the liberation movement of the 1970s and early 1980s, their involvement in other areas of identity formation is equally significant. Let me give a few examples. Firstly, in the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, women performed countless vital functions. For example, when the Israelis bombarded the Ain el-Hilweh refugee camp in Sidon, the camp was evacuated and some of the refugees took shelter in a local hospital. However, the hospital was also attacked. Women in these places, said Souad, a woman in her late 50s, "were cooking, washing clothes – it provided a basic level of survival. They brought flour to make bread. It was distributed to all the people. There were no male adults to take care of the family, so the women had to do it... It was a big responsibility for women. Life was hard at that time; three or four families had to live together".<sup>4</sup> The role of Palestinian women during this period, explained Nayla, a resident of Ain el-Hilweh camp, was "to take care of their families after the imprisonment of the men".<sup>5</sup>

Women also worked to rebuild the destroyed camps, sometimes with their bare hands. In Nayla's words: "Journalists came. They saw how the women were cleaning the camp and trying to make it feel like home. When they saw women cleaning and using cement to rebuild the houses, they asked why we were doing it. The women replied that we were working like this because the young men were in prison. Slowly we were

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Hammami, Rema, "Gender, Nakbe and Nation: Palestinian Women's Presence and Absence in the Narration of 1948 Memories", *Review of Women's Studies*, Volume 2, 2004, Institute of Women's Studies, Birzeit University.

<sup>2</sup> Swedenburg, Ted, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*, Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, p.175.

<sup>3</sup> Sa'di & Abu-Lughod 2007, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Personal interview, Ain el-Hilweh camp, Sidon, 7 June 2003

<sup>5</sup> Personal interview, Ain el-Hilweh camp, Sidon, 7 June 2003

able to rebuild the houses so that the families could return.”<sup>1</sup> These narratives illustrate the extraordinary resilience displayed by many women during a very frightening period.

My second example recalls the first intifada, during which women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip participated in innovative ways of resisting the Israeli occupation. For example, women took part in protests and confrontations with the Israeli army; they were central in organizing and maintaining essential services such as education for children and students, the provision of health care, and the distribution of basic foodstuffs. Their work was social but also political, and their behaviour, as in Lebanon, challenged traditional forms of social control such as the family and the patriarchal nature of society. Raja Shehadeh has spoken of the strength of these women. “They have the least to lose” he writes, “and no ego to be pampered... They have been used to...oppression by men from the day they were born.”<sup>2</sup>

The following is another example. In the run-up to the Palestinian elections of January 2006, women took an active part in the victory of Hamas. Having endured seven years of disproportionate Israeli aggression and the construction of an architecture of oppression in the West Bank, many Palestinians – including women, who expressed frustration at their inability to play a meaningful role in the second intifada – have come to regard resistance that has the support of religion as being one of the few options available to them. This is why the majority of Palestinians, especially women, voted Hamas into power in the January 2006 elections. In the opinion of Maha, a student at Birzeit University, people voted for Hamas because they needed to see changes in all aspects of life. Islamic movements, she added, look at a woman in a different way to others; they look beyond her body to her mind, and this is attractive to women.<sup>3</sup> During the election campaign, Hamas effectively mobilized women. For example, women went to different houses and convinced other women to vote for Hamas.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, if we look at the refugee camps of Lebanon today, we can see the diverse supportive and constructive activities undertaken by women. Many women in the camps speak of being weary of politics. Political and military struggles, they argue, have failed to retrieve the homeland or solve the conflict. In the meantime, there are many practical pressures on

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<sup>1</sup> Personal interview, Ain el-Hilweh camp, Sidon, 7 June 2003

<sup>2</sup> Shehadeh, Raja, *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank*, London: Quartet Books, 1982, p.115.

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview, Birzeit University, near Ramallah, 3 November 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Personal interview, Ramallah, 3 November 2007.

them: to ensure the well-being of their children, to protect their own rights in an environment which remains intensely patriarchal, to care for the elderly and vulnerable members of their community and, above all, to tell the story of Palestine to the world.

### **The blessings of memory**

Palestinian women, both those who live in Palestine and those now located outside the borders of their homeland, possess a rich store of memories. It was women, both in Lebanon and the West Bank, who told me about Palestine-as-homeland. Their memories are characterized by respect for a way of life and place. Those old enough to remember Palestine before 1948 described life in traditional village settings. What came across to me most strongly were feelings of continuity, familiarity and satisfaction. For example, Um Nabil, an 80-year old woman from the village of Kabri in northern Palestine described how she used to work in the fields and orchards where her family grew grapes and olives and pressed the olives to make oil. Everything came from the land, she added.<sup>1</sup> Layla, a woman in her late 60s, who was born in Palestine, spoke of trust between neighbours. They were simple people, she said, and they had good hearts.<sup>2</sup> And Hala, who left Palestine when she was 15, recalled that her village was “very lovely” and that it had big orchards. Her father was a carpenter, and they lived a very happy life and helped each other.<sup>3</sup> This raises the question of how memories such as these affect identity today. As Rosemary Sayigh notes: “The village – with its special arrangements of houses and orchards, its open meeting-places, its burial ground, its collective identity – was built into the personality of each individual villager to a degree that made separation like an obliteration of the self.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Shared experiences of suffering**

The familiar life was violently interrupted and effectively ended in 1948. At that time, Palestine was a predominantly rural society, and identity, therefore, was strongly associated with the land. Swedenburg argues that an “individual’s loss of land to Zionist colonization came to be

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<sup>1</sup> Personal interview, Bourj el-Barajne camp, Beirut, 7 February 2007

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview, Bourj el-Barajne camp, 4 February 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview, Bourj el-Barajne camp, Beirut, 3 June 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Sayigh, Rosemary, *Palestinians from peasants to revolutionaries: a people’s history*, London: Zed Press, 1979, p.107.

regarded as an affront to the national honour...these constituents of the (male) individual's identity – family, honour, land, women – resonated with the aura of the nation".<sup>1</sup> But what implications does this have for women's notions of identity?

Refugee women tell stories of change, of how they and their families were abruptly uprooted from their places of belonging and plunged into terrifying uncertainty. Mariam, a woman who was born in Palestine in 1936 and now lives in Beirut, told me about her childhood in Jaffa. She described hearing bombs and shooting at night, people shouting. In April 1948, she recalls, they headed north, through a landscape of explosions and overturned vehicles. The family left most of their possessions behind, confident that the problem would soon be solved. She never saw her home again.<sup>2</sup> Layla, who left Palestine when she was a child, recalled her mother telling her that, because of the bombs, people would have to leave for a week or two, so they left without clothing or even documents. Her older sister was engaged and had a pair of new shoes for her wedding, but her family said, "Don't wear your new shoes or they will be ruined," so she left them, remembered Layla, for the Israelis.<sup>3</sup> The family now lives in Bourj el-Barajne camp in Beirut.

Women's narratives chart the journeys undertaken by the Palestinians into exile. They include many small details of how people coped. Nada, for example, a child in Bourj el-Shemali camp in southern Lebanon, said: "My grandmother tells me about the Palestine war. She tells me how they left when the war broke out inside Palestine and people were being killed... She said they kept moving from one town to another and they lived in tents along the beach."<sup>4</sup> Several women in Beirut told me about how they had first lived in tents. Gradually these had become more solid structures, but still did not replace the homes they had left behind. Women have shared the struggle and disappointment of men. Both have played a role in resistance against the occupation and also the ongoing fight for self-determination. In their own ways, both women and men have sought to assert their independence as a nation, but the methods they have used have been different.

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<sup>1</sup> Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p.79.

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview, Beirut, 6 June 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview, Bourj el-Barajne camp, Beirut, 4 February 2007

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Bassem, Serhan, and Samia Tabari, "Palestinian Refugee Children and Caregivers in Lebanon", in Dawn Chatty and Gillian Lewando Hundt, editors, *Children of Palestine: Experiencing Forced Migration in the Middle East*, New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005, p.49.

## The role of morality

What effect is the culture of destructive violence having on Palestinian identity, as understood by women, and how is the tension between precious memories and current chaos affecting women's sense of identity and involvement? In order to explore women's unease and increasing helplessness in the face of violence, I want to discuss briefly the role of morality. In the period before the first intifada and the emergence of Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank and Gaza worked to create "the preconditions for an Islamic moral order".<sup>1</sup> Lisa Taraki argues that the Brotherhood was successful "in bringing a significant number of young refugee camp and urban women out of their homes and into mosques... Increasing numbers of young women and even girls adopted the 'uniform' of the Islamist movement".<sup>2</sup>

However, while a broad cross-section of Palestinians, across age, class, gender and geographic divides, supported and participated in the first intifada and felt it to be a moral struggle, the waging of the second intifada has been more ambiguous. Some observers have remarked on feelings of moral decay, which are beginning to afflict the community. It is here that the Islamist movement has come to play an increasingly significant role.

Islamists appeal to female members of the community on several levels. Firstly, they address the problem of Palestinian victimization. To become a victim is shameful and this is something with which women have great sympathy. The Palestinian people have been victimized by Israel for more than 60 years without effectively being able to fight back. Since its election in 2006, the Hamas government has been victimized by the international community. Some women complain that, although it is based on correct Islamic principles, this government has not been given a chance to introduce beneficial policies. Secondly, Islamist groups appeal to women on the level of good moral behaviour. They promote the protection of women and the promotion of appropriate female roles. Thirdly, these groups also strengthen notions of community and the role of the active citizen. Finally, by rejecting traditional practices of corruption and ignorance, they present a compelling vision of modernity.

In the camps of Lebanon, too, many women express contempt for failed political projects, and some are turning towards Islam but, in this

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<sup>1</sup> Taraki, Lisa, "The Palestinian Resistance Movement in the Palestinian Uprising", in *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation*, edited by Zachary Lockman and Joel Benin, Boston MA: South End Press, 1989, p.172.

<sup>2</sup> Taraki, "The Palestinian Resistance Movement in the Palestinian Uprising", pp.173-4.

case, in terms of enhanced religious knowledge rather than party politics. For these women, a greater awareness of Islam creates self-respect and resilience. It enables them to contribute in important ways towards the well-being of the community, for example through teaching other women about their Islamic and human rights and by working with youth, elderly people, widows and the disabled to create more tolerable living conditions. These women, like women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, are trying to build a model human being, one that is modern and also moral.

## **Conclusion: crisis and the changing shape of Palestinian identity**

I want to consider, in conclusion, some of the ways in which women work to challenge adversity and how these differ from male methods of dealing with crisis and threat. Modes of survival articulated by women fall into three main categories. Firstly, she is an activist, working side by side with men in the liberation struggle and national resistance; secondly, she is a mother, struggling to protect her children from harm, responsible for the production of the next generation who will continue the struggle; and, thirdly, she is the keeper of memory and the protector of national identity. However, many observers argue that Palestinian national identity is currently facing a crisis, assaulted by fragmentation from within and demonization from outside.

Notions of “national identity”, clearly, have undergone significant changes since 1948. In the process, Palestinians have developed new ways of envisaging themselves as a nation. Since the majority of Palestinians are now situated outside the borders of their original homeland, their evolving identity contains some notion of cosmopolitanism. They live as diasporic communities. It is possible, therefore, to discern two distinct facets of identities, one in Palestine itself and the other among Palestinians outside the country, but both are assailed by a degree of crisis and both involve the input of women. I think that women have strongly influenced the evolution of a transnational, diasporic identity, rooted both in the memory of place and the reality of placelessness.

Edward Said has referred to the difficulty for Palestinians of being heard. In his words, “whenever a Palestinian tries to tell a story, to put in a dramatic and realizable way the interrupted story of Palestine and its connection to the story of Israel, it’s systematically attacked”.<sup>1</sup> In his

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<sup>1</sup> Barsamiam, David, “An Interview with Edward W Said”, *Z Magazine*, February 1992.

opening remarks at the Madrid Peace Conference of October 1991, Haidar Abdel-Shafi said: "It is time for us to narrate our own story".<sup>1</sup> I think that women have found it more difficult than men have to "make their voices heard" or "narrate their own stories", and their attempts to gain respect as participants in the process of identity construction have been similarly problematic. At the same time, as Shehadeh said, women's lack of ego and the fact that they have less to lose has meant they have had no choice but to develop other forms of strength. By surviving the cruelties of exile and occupation and locating appropriate methods of coping with crisis, Palestinian women have been able to subvert notions of a Palestinian national identity and therefore, I believe, are well placed to deal with the current crisis in Palestinian society.

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<sup>1</sup> The Unheard Voices, Palestinians Speaking About Themselves", *Oral History Association*, Annual Meeting, Cleveland, Ohio, October 17, 1992.



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# PSYCHOSOCIAL-POLITICAL PERCEPTION OF IDENTITY AMONG PALESTINIAN YOUTH

AHMAD M. BAKER\*

Although the topic of identity development in children has received extensive attention by psychologists, it remains fertile ground for social scientists who wish to liberate themselves from traditional theories of child psychosocial development. There is ample conceptual, constructual, theoretical, and empirical evidence available to psychologists to predict the global course of development in children. Sociologists, political scientists, and other social scientists also have delineated many of the variables and factors that influence the course of change which takes place naturally within societies. This plethora of “scientific” evidence, however, was accumulated mainly by Westerners and concerned Western societies. The relatively sparse, available, and accumulated knowledge on Asian, African, and Latin American societies, unfortunately, was also either conducted by Western researchers or interpreted within the context of Western theories and constructs (Khalefa, 1997; Kim & Berry, 1993; Probst, 1996). Native researchers in the developing countries are cognizant of the fact that a substantial amount of the information, data, and artifacts collected on their societies and cultures is held in “trust” in the archives and data banks of the developed nations. In essence, I argue that developed nations are far superior to the developing nations not only economically, militarily, and technologically but also, far more ominously, in their knowledge of the developing nations. We (developing nations) are studied, examined, and analyzed by the other (developed nations) more than we study, examine, and analyze ourselves. Any analysis on the development of identity within transitional societies we present today is to some extent “hostage” to this epistemological “bondage”. Furthermore, the expansive nature of the topic dictates that we delineate the limits of our argument prior to delving into our presentation.

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First of all, I would like to make it clear that it is not my intention to present, argue, or expound on the natural development of identity in youth. Any deserving textbook on psychosocial and child development can outperform my effort. Nor do I intend to focus on the nature of individual identity development in youth. The purpose of my presentation will be to examine analytically the course of collective national identity in transitional societies. More specifically, I will focus on the manner in which the collective identity of a society develops within the context of the conflict it finds itself embroiled in. That conflict is between the “image” the society draws for itself and the “image” the other wishes to impose on it. In other words, the first gist of my argument will be that the development of identity in transitional societies (developing societies) is inherently one of conflict.

Second, it is not the intention of this presentation to focus on societies undergoing natural social change. Instead, my thrust will be on societies that are undergoing a transition from being politically liberated from colonialism or occupation to being liberated from cultural hegemony. The struggle of liberation in these societies, I argue, has a profound effect on how the collective identity develops. Finally, being most familiar with a society (Palestinian) that is in the clutches of this transitional process, and midway through it, I will utilize this experience to shed light on the arguments I propose for illustrative purposes only.

## **The Concept of Identity in Non-Western Societies**

Although the term “identity” is the object of our discourse and analysis in this session, I am uncertain how alien this term is to non-Western societies, especially those in Asia and Africa. The modern Arabic term for identity (*howiyya*) seems to be a recent phenomenon. Barghouthi (1995), for example, could not find the term mentioned in Arabic lexicons prior to the mid nineteenth century. He cites Bustani (1819-1883) showing that the term has both philosophic and linguistic roots. Linguistically, it is derived from the singular pronoun “*howa*” (he) denoting “the absolute truth that enfolds all truths of the unknown just as a kernel unfolds its own potential tree” (p. 150). Furthermore, the term also could be derived from the “union with the self”, i.e. complete personal identity. Hence, the term “identity” in Arabic juxtaposes, derives, and unites the individual with the collective. The diffusion between the individual and the collective also appears to be true in African societies. For example, there are no comparable terms for “uncle,” “aunt,” or “niece” in Xhosa. No linguistic differentiation is made between father and uncle, mother and aunt,

daughter and niece. Personal identity is derived from the collective one. The former unfolds only within the realm of the latter. Hence, personal identity is also derived from the historic development of collective identity. Palestinian identity, as an example, is a product of Arab, Muslim-Christian, and national legacies. Its origin, as is the case in many African and Asian societies, is tribal. Consequently, one cannot address a people's collective identity divorced from its legacy and culture. Heritage provides the ligature that maintains the integrity of identity. The destruction of a people's culture is tantamount to the destruction of its identity.

### **Identity Development within an Occupation Relationship**

Fanon (1965) elucidated the relationship between the colonized/occupied and the colonizer/occupier as one of continued conflict. The colonizer/occupier does not relinquish his dream of subjugating the native, who, in turn, refuses to relinquish his aspiration of gaining independence from his colonizer/occupier. Physical subjugation, the occupier learns, however, cannot be maintained indefinitely and without great cost. Unfortunately, his dream of subjugating the native does not extinguish itself as he relinquishes his physical control over him. His aspiration finds its expression in the colonization of the native's culture and, ultimately, the colonization of his mind and identity. The native, on the other hand, tries desperately to rediscover his identity by navigating the pages of his history and culture. The occupier, aware of this need, craftily tries to provide him with a map whose landmarks were not etched by the native's ancestors. The quest for the indigenous landmarks becomes of crucial importance. The emerging collective identity of this nation in transition thus becomes contingent on the landmarks it assimilates. It is within this context that I postulate that the development of identity within occupied societies is inherently one of conflict. The image the colonizer/occupier desires for the native to formulate for himself (i.e. identity) is essentially that of the colonizer/occupier but packaged in native clothing. It is this identity that Steve Biko referred to as "Whites walking in Black skin". This process can be achieved only through colonization of the mind, of culture, and of historical legacy. Identity thus becomes the battleground between national assertion on the one hand and domination and subjugation by the occupying power on the other hand.

Children and youth develop their identity in a series of ever increasing-decreasing and expanding-contracting concentric cultural circles. The number of circles dictates only the extent to which identity becomes constricted or global. True identity, however, is defined by the cultural

images the child or youth assimilates. One process is quantitative; the other, qualitative. Although I will touch upon the quantitative aspect of this process, my main thrust will be on its qualitative aspects. It is this aspect of identity development that becomes the target of occupational manipulation versus national will.

The term identity, as we have seen, may be a relatively nascent phenomenon in developing countries. Its coining in the mid-nineteenth century in the Arab world, however, may not have been a capricious event. The advent of the modern collective Arab identity is highly correlated with the advent of Arab nationalism during that period. Prior to that, the concentric circles encompassing Arab identity were limited to the religious (primarily Muslim) and the tribal. Palestinian identity became crystallized and strengthened in direct proportion to the strength of Palestinian nationalism. The collective identity of those inhabiting Palestine prior to World War I was primarily Muslim-Arab-tribal. Arab identity superseded Palestinian collective identity only prior to the disintegration of Palestine in 1948 and the rise of the Palestinian national resistance movement in the early sixties. Recent studies conducted by this author and other psychologists show that Palestinian national identity is a direct function of the contiguity between the Palestinian national resistance movement and the population it influences directly. For example, Mahjoub and his colleagues (1989) found that Palestinian youth living in Palestine (West Bank and Gaza Strip), Syria and Lebanon identify themselves as Palestinian in word and social representation. When requested to respond to the stimulus "I am...", most of the respondents identified themselves as Palestinian, Palestinian-Arab, or Arab-Palestinian. Few perceived their identity to be only Arab or Muslim. Furthermore, when the subjects were asked to complete drawings using crayons of variant colors (brown, white, black, red, green, yellow, blue), they invariably chose Palestinian colors (red, green, black, white) more than the other colors. The most prominent themes emanating from the drawings were also Palestinian in essence (e.g., Palestinian flag, scenes of resistance, etc.). On the other hand, my research on Palestinian youth born and living in Israel does not support the assumption that they identify themselves primarily as Palestinian in word or social representation. While Palestinian children and youth living in Israeli occupied Palestine and Palestinian refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon identified themselves as Palestinian, Palestinian children and youth living in Israel identified themselves as Israeli-Arabs or "Arabs of the inside". Furthermore, while the national colors of Palestine (red, green, black, and white) dominated the drawings of the former group, the national colors of Israel (blue and white) dominated the drawings of the

latter group. Hence, we can detect the battle here between the assertion and the repression of national identity. Although Arabs living in Israel are ethnically Palestinian, Israel adamantly resists and combats such a development by fragmenting the collective national identity of Palestinians living in Israel into sub-collective identities such as Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Bedouins encapsulated within a larger and incongruent structure called Israeli-Arabs. In essence, Israeli policy reverts the collective identity of the Palestinians under its rule to mid nineteenth century levels. The collective identity of Palestinians in Israel, Mi'ari (1986, 1992) found, also was closely correlated with the rise of Palestinian and Arab nationalism. He shows that the identity of the Palestinians who came under Israeli rule in 1948 shifted from primarily being "Arab-Israeli" between 1948-1973 to primarily "Arab" and "Arab-Palestinian" between 1973 and 1986. It is interesting to note here that this shift came following the 1973 October War between Israel, on the one hand, and Egypt and Syria, on the other, but did not take place following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. This finding is quite understandable given that Arabs, in general, and Palestinian Arabs living in Israel, in particular, found it psychologically difficult to identify with the performance of the Arab armies in 1967 in comparison with their admirable performance in the 1973 October War. Recent evidence seems to suggest that a third shift took place in the identity development of Palestinians in Israel. While they identified themselves more as "Arab-Palestinian" between 1973 and 1986, they identified themselves as "Palestinian Arabs" between 1986 and 1992. This shift, it is believed, is attributable to the rise of Palestinian nationalism following the onset of the popular Palestinian uprising (intifada) in the occupied territories at the end of 1987. It is not yet known how much impact the legitimacy which Palestinian identity achieved, internationally and from Israel following the Oslo Agreements in 1993, had on the identity of Palestinians in Israel.

Assertion of a national identity, as we have seen, is the first step in the development of an indigenous identity. Although the assertion of the national indigenous identity is a necessary condition for the development of a truly native identity, it is not sufficient. The characteristics of the newly adopted identity must be indigenous. The crucial battle for dominance or liberation is fought on this front. Identity will be determined by the culture that ultimately dominates.

The history of Palestinians under Israeli occupation has taught us that the aim of Israeli military rule was not only to occupy territories, but also to destroy all the authentic characteristics of Palestinians. The power of occupation aimed not only to destroy the individual in the Palestinian

child, but also his/her culture, identity and social authenticity. At the risk of sounding radical, *I shall refer to this strategy as cultural genocide*. I posit here that the occupier's aspiration of hegemony can only be achieved through the annihilation or denial of the indigenous culture in order to replace it with that of the occupier. This is accomplished through a series of steps. Palestinians in Israel faced the worst means of destruction of the self and identity. Palestinian children in Israel were often referred to by Israeli Jewish children as "Dirty Arabs". They were taught Jewish history, while their legacy and heritage were either ignored or denied. Palestinians in the West Bank faced harsher experiences, youth being the most affected and vulnerable ones.

It is difficult for a child to develop a deep sense of his native history and culture if the sources (s)he must rely on are considered to be primitive. It is this weakness that occupation takes advantage of in order to perpetuate its culture. Not only is the information we feed our minds "culture-coated", but also the manner in which we begin to think is not native. As we become accustomed to a mode of thought, we find it difficult to be at ease with another system. In essence, insidiously and unconsciously, we become the agents of our former rulers. The native culture is described as primitive, outmoded, or simplistic. As Fanon stated, European colonists could not envisage an African as having a "culture" other than being primitive or savage. In order for the native to achieve success, he must refute his native values and practices, even dress. In pre-university education the books used by our pupils and students not only do not have Palestinian role models, but they also portray the Israeli as more advanced and sophisticated. A Palestinian educator in Israel analyzed the curriculum taught to "Israeli-Arab" children. Not only did she find that Palestinian and Arab culture and history were completely ignored in the curriculum; she also found that Israeli and Jewish histories were portrayed as superior. Arab names of geographic locations were replaced with Hebrew ones. Arab dishes like falafel and hummos become Israeli national dishes. In the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip the display of the Palestinian flag or colors was a security offense prior to the Oslo Agreements. Parents faced insurmountable difficulties to register their children if their names in Arabic meant liberation (Tahreer), holy war (Jihad), or Palestine (Filistin). It should be noted here that such names are common amongst Arabs. Furthermore, children, youth, and adults were forbidden to sing national songs or recite patriotic poetry.

Irrespective of the method or practice used, the ultimate goal of occupation is either to deny, reject, or obliterate the native's indigenous heritage and culture. Depriving children and youth of their cultural



heritage leads to their psychological untethering from their native culture and anchoring to the culture of their oppressor. In other words, the identity model that the youth begins to adopt is not her native one. Leiser (1991) has defined such practices as a form of genocide. He states:

“One of the most insidious forms of genocide consists of the destruction of a people’s culture by depriving it of its works of art, its literature, its language, or the land to which it is rooted. By tearing children away from their parents and communities, compelling them to be raised in a foreign environment where they will be deprived of their own culture and required to assimilate to that of their captors.”

The human story behind the occupation of the Palestinian mind and the cultural genocide associated with it has been missed amid the political and military turmoil. As Du Bois stated in his book “The Soul of Black Folks”:

“So he grew and brought within his wide influence all that was best of those who walk within the Veil. They who live without knew not nor dreamed of that full power within, that mighty inspiration which the dull gauze of caste decreed that men should not know...He did his work; he did it nobly and well, and yet I sorrow that here he worked alone, with so little human sympathy...And herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor, - all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked, - who is good? Not that men are ignorant, - what is truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men.”

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# PAST MATTERS: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF PALESTINIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

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## Introduction

The cultural heritage of Palestinians is one aspect of collective memory that remains visible yet is perpetually overwritten by other narratives and other meanings. The American archaeologist, Albert Glock, argued that external powers have attempted to control Palestine for nearly 4,000 years and, as a result, Palestinians have been forced to flee into exile or bargain for survival with these powers in order to gain historical and cultural fulfillment. At the heart of this is the notion that the Palestinian people, as an ethnic and national community, have been disassociated from their past and restricted in the development of an independent, indigenous cultural heritage narrative.

Yet, today, Palestinians are building unique heritage narratives that commingle the history of a distant past with the political strife of present-day occupation and displacement. The result is that Palestinian cultural heritage is actively becoming integrated within the construction and maintenance of Palestinian national identity rather than being entirely subjected to the goals and desires of American, European and Israeli scholars seeking to reaffirm decidedly Judeo-Christian narratives. Based on ethnographic field research conducted between 2004 and 2006, this paper will explore how Palestinians are actively constructing heritage narratives that infuse past with present and ultimately wrest control of Palestinian cultural heritage from external powers.

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## **Nationalizing the Past in a Stateless State**

Nationalism as a form of collective identity, or “nation-ness”, is not a fixed reality based on natural boundaries or historical unity; rather, this form of collective identity is an imagined or forced production by populations searching for a means to distinguish themselves from other populations bound within a nation-state structure (Anderson 1991: 6). The power of these imagined collective identities can be demonstrated by the fact that most individuals within such a grouping will never meet their fellow members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their shared identity (Anderson 1991: 6). This collective identity, and for that matter collective memory, is the result of an active process of construction on behalf of the community itself and the individuals who comprise the community. Much of a community’s life becomes involved in defining a collective story of common origins that serves to transcend the particular biography of each individual in favor of the group narrative (Azaryahu and Kook 2002: 199). The past provides the symbolic and iconic elements that nations and communities latch onto in order to substantiate their constructed collective identities and memories.

Archaeological and cultural heritage is but one tool used to foster and construct collective identities and collective memories of the past. It is argued that the close ties between collective identity, collective memory and cultural heritage are based upon the demands of communities searching for evidence to support the existence of a widely accepted past that is perpetually learned and propagated (Diaz-Andreu and Champion 1996: 3). The role of research focused on cultural heritage, specifically in terms of collective identity and collective memory, has several uses, the most pertinent being how archaeology legitimizes the territorial boundaries of the community and subsequently affirms a sense of collective identity within these legitimized territorial boundaries.

The majority of nationalist traditions in cultural heritage research are oriented towards the construction of collective identities at the nation-state level and function to provide a cohesive agent for these populations (Trigger 1984: 358). Within the realm of cultural heritage research, archaeology is a fundamental and unique institution for communities attempting to link their present collective identity to historic and prehistoric communities. This struggle to connect contemporary communities with historical and heritage legacy becomes bound within an essentially political process of decisions, calculations and negotiations which strive to manipulate the past in such a manner that it provides the ideological and existential justifications for action in the here and now.

The broader nexus between politics and science is inhabited by disciplines dedicated to the study of the past because they serve the state as managers of historic narrative, knowledge and prestige. In particular, the utilization of archaeology is beneficial to nation-states because they are often uniquely situated for possessing the necessary apparatuses to support the services required by elite specialists (i.e. trained and accredited archaeologists) who produce and control the past (Gero 1985: 342).

Many modern nation-states have in the past, as well as in the present, encouraged archaeologists to engage with frameworks geared towards national collective identities, devoting considerable financial assets to their advancement (cf. Arnold 1999; Diaz-Andreu 2002; Fowler 1987; Gero 1989; Petersen 2005; Trigger 1984; 1989). The investment of tremendous financial and scholarly resources in the archaeological search for a national collective past benefits the state by offering an official version of the past, confirming important aspects of national collective identity and denying a voice to alternative claims (Whitelam 1996: 18). This “heritage industry” often works to package and sell the past as a commodity, both figuratively and literally, which can enable both dominant and, increasingly, subordinated communities to utilize the market of heritage (Hodder 1990: 14).

As a mechanism for producing collective history and identity, heritage research is crucial in establishing links between modern populations and the territories they occupy. Once established boundaries are defined, then specific populations can claim ownership of particular parcels of land. Legitimizing the territorial boundaries is particularly vital for populations struggling to connect with lands that hold cultural, social and/or religious significance (Newman 2001: 236). Typically, these communities attempt to create a master commemorative narrative highlighting a commonality of the past and legitimizing aspirations for a shared territory and destiny (Zerubavel 1995: 214). The successive strata uncovered in archaeological excavations become the “proof” of national authenticity and a powerful instrument for rediscovering and recreating the evolving nation (Smith 2001: 441). Thus, histories and pre-histories focused on building collective identities serve to instill a uniform sense of pride, morale and identity within the population (Trigger 1984: 360). Furthermore, heritage research that bolsters the perception of collective identity is crucial for the perpetuation of a homogenized identity among populations that are essentially heterogeneous in composition.

Accounts of the past, particularly those bound to the same territory, are in competition, and, as such, are written or heard at a particular moment in time and addressed to a known audience that has certain expectations

regarding the construction of their heritage narratives (Whitelam 1996: 30). Therefore, the construction of heritage narratives is not a static process isolated from current political and social struggles; rather, narratives (both dominant and alternative) are actively defined and redefined in order to meet the needs of contemporary communities. Tilley (1989: 112) argues that “the past is not in any sense immobile or fixed or written indelibly; rather, it is something to be strategically reconstructed in relation to contemporary social and historical conditions, to be actively reinterpreted and re-inscribed within the present social order”. More specifically, narrative construction is not simply a recording of “what happened” in the transition from one state of affairs to another but a progressive re-description of sets of events in such a way as to dismantle an original structure and to justify an alternative recording of it at a later point (White 1978: 98). As such, narrative construction, augmented through heritage research, becomes a social and political action of the present mediated upon the materials and cultures of the past. This active and dynamic process alters the reality of historic and cultural heritage research from a stable, positivist endeavor meant to produce objective, knowable truths to a fluid, interpretive action that can shape and modify contemporary social and political realities.

Many non-Western nation-states, particularly in the Middle East, resulted from the European imperial and colonial division of territories into regions and districts that were economically, politically, or bureaucratically more manageable than their predecessors. These nation-states, born out of imperial or colonial administration, are not typically composed of cohesive or homogeneous ethnic communities. In reality, not only are the ethnic populations of most states mixed, but also the boundaries of these states do not often coincide with the extent of a single ethnic population (Smith 1988: 129). Despite the heterogeneous nature of many nation-states, the various ethnic populations within a nation may find it advantageous to forge a collective identity and, subsequently, a collective memory of their past. This process of creating a collective identity, and eventually collective historical and heritage narratives, is often an act of socialization enacted on the individual by the community. Ultimately, acquiring the common memories of a community (and, in so doing, identifying with its collective past) is part of the process of acquiring any social identity, and familiarizing members with that past is a major part of the community's efforts to assimilate them (Zerubavel 2003: 3).