Palestinian Dynamics of Self-Representation: Identity and Difference in Palestinian Nationalism

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AMAL JAMAL
Tel Aviv University, Israel

ABSTRACT: *This paper deals with the dialectics of identity-construction and self-representation in the Palestinian national movement. It demonstrates how some transformations regarding self-image have been transpiring among Palestinians. It is divided into two main parts; the first deals with the first three decades following the 1948 exile during which thousands of Palestinians found themselves out of their homeland. This new reality led many of them to conceptualize a monolithic self-image that was presented to the world. As a result of the surrounding political, economic and cultural circumstances, as well as internal dissatisfaction with the official self-image propagated by the national movement, Palestinian intellectuals began to draw new self-images. The differences in experience and the discontent with the self-image received by the world, have induced various Palestinians to begin constructing self-images that portray their benevolent and humane sidees. This process, still ongoing, mirrors the growing differentiation among Palestinians and marks the contention of some Palestinian intellectuals with the masculinist image propagated by the leadership of the national movement.*

Introduction

Theoretically, this article is an attempt to illustrate the relationship between practices of subjective self-constitution and location (Hall, 1996). Location is not taken to be merely a fixed physical place, but also a positionality that is always in flux, changing as a result of circumstances and consciousness. It claims that the process of self-constitution in national movements is not and cannot be coherent and that the positionality of national intellectuals determine the way in which they imagine their national community. On the practical level, this article is about Palestinian multifaceted experience of identity formation. It examines the dialectical relationship between official national narratives of the collective self and counter private practices of discursive self-constitution (Guha, 1997). It presumes that 'difference' rather than 'identity' has become the triumphant

national self-image in Palestinian society that has lost its physical anchor in its homeland and became scattered throughout. In the period following 1948, when initial stages of nation-building emerged, Palestinian official national discourse tended to be expressed in monolithic, essentialist and coherent terms. It replicated colonial discourse by invoking essentialist national images based on the memories of the common experience in Palestine prior to 1948 (Chatterjee, 1986). The most dominant image at this stage was the figure of the militant Palestinian fida'i who was willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of liberation and redemption of the homeland. This image introduced a concrete, solid identity based on two elements: territory and paternity. From a political point of view, Palestinian identity was contingent on the rejoining of the people and the land through liberation, return and statehood. As a result, Palestinian nationhood became dependent on the Palestinians' political ability to reconstruct the political circumstances in their lost homeland by reuniting the people with its land.

The coherent self-image was challenged by the differing existential conditions in which the various Palestinian communities lived after their expulsion and dispersal from Palestine. The rising experiential gaps among the different Palestinian communities led to a growing discrepancy in Palestinian practices of subjective self-constitution. Different experiences in miscellaneous localities gave rise to multiple and diversified self-images that did not cohere and/or even contend with the official national discourse. This process was intensified by the internal differences regarding the future political vision that Palestinians foresaw for themselves. Although it would not be thoughtful to indicate a clear demarcating line between the different stages of self-conceptualization, towards the end of the 1970s new images began playing central roles in practices of self-constitution. Self-presentation strategies increasingly reflected the existential conditions of the different Palestinian communities. There had been attempts to disconnect Palestinian self-definition from specific aggressive and violent images, especially that emphasizing the congruency between the struggle for national redemption and deadly sacrifice of the self. The new voices reflected differential positionalities and self-perceptions. They countered the dominant national narrative and the image it perpetuated to maintain its disciplinary power. They also sought the construction of Palestinian self-images that would disrupt the silencing force of the Zionist narrative and its moral power. They came to reinstitute a humane dimension into the Palestinian self-image presented to the world after a long period in which the monolithic image of the fida'i had been exploited by Israeli propaganda to discredit Palestinians' claim for self-determination. These voices also struggled against deprived positioning of Palestinian minority groups, especially refugees. These attempts exacerbated the gaps between the different Palestinian communities, exposing alienation or even antagonism in their relationships. Such antagonistic relationships surfaced more blatantly following the signing of the

Oslo agreement and the silencing of voices representing refugee interests. The national elite's involvement in the production of the colonial structures of rule and in replicating colonial discourses, have led many Palestinians to deploy counter narratives that upset the hegemony of the official national discourse.

This article attempts to follow the dynamics of Palestinian self-presentation as it was presented in various Palestinian political and literary writings, in order to expose its hegemonic and some of its counter-hegemonic practices as well. It utilizes hermeneutic methods to examine how the socio-political settings of different Palestinians have influenced the way some constitute their self-image in a way that counters the essentialist-masculinist image propagated by the national movement. Social reality is rich and complex. The texts chosen are only a small portion of a larger, much wealthier intellectual and literary corpus. Those chosen for this analysis are claimed to be central and may be viewed as those that best reflect the changes in the manner Palestinians constitute their self-image and imagine their community. The selective examination of illustrative texts is only is intended to enable readers to follow a broader process that is taking place among Palestinians as a result of the gaps in positionality and experience. The reader is invited to pose questions as to the validitiy of my choices and my arguments. Nevertheless, I hope to be convincing by utilizing these methods of discursive analysis.

This study is not conclusive, rather it is illustrative. It will not go beyond analyzing several documents and literary contributions in order to illuminate the assumptions presented above. The texts will be examined as fields in which a process of identity formation was, and is, presently being negotiated. Texts enter the public sphere as a force and a tool to make political and moral claims. They are vehicles of social actors to counter domination as much as they are tools of domination. This task will draw upon R. Hodge's definition of discourses which are "seen as social constructs, sustained at particular times by particular groups to serve particular interests: an ideological machine concerned with legitimization and control, working through a system that excludes or privileges certain kinds of text...and specific readings and modes of readings." (Hodge, 1990: viii) Texts, whether political or literary, are taken as events that are part of the "social world, human life, and ... historical moments in which they are located and interpreted." (Said, 1991: 4) Cultural images and aesthetic forms contained in texts derive from historical experience bridging the gap between the individual and his collective affiliations. Perceived in this way, there is no clear quantitative criteria for measuring the effectiveness of a particular text on the public sphere.

The texts analyzed in this article were chosen for three main reasons. First, the people who wrote them are not disconnected literary figures, but activists who were engaged in shaping Palestinian politics and in promoting the world's understanding of the Palestinian struggle for nationhood and self-

determination. Second, these people are well-read in Palestinian circles and have contributed to the constitution and crystallization of national awareness. Part of the texts analyzed were written with the intention of reflecting upon the national consciousness of the Palestinians and drawing attention to the ongoing negotiating process regarding the national image. Third, texts were chosen in order to reflect the intersection between exilic Palestinians, who live in the diaspora and have internalized global visions of the self, and Palestinians who live on their land and are tied to the geography surrounding them. The differentiation processes of subjective self-constitution are taking place in exile as well as in the homeland.

National Identity and Self-Representation

Two aspects of identity are commonly accepted, namely its relational and constructionist characters. (Arkin, 1992: 6) These two aspects challenge "the idea that identity is given naturally and that it is produced purely by acts of individual will."(Calhoun, 1994: 13) They also challenge 'essentialist' notions that "individual persons can have singular, integral, altogether harmonious and unproblematic identities."(Calhoun, 1994: 13) Identity develops within a *relationship* between an individual and his context, whether familial, social, cultural, occupational or all these taken together. Henri Tajfel defined social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his membership of a social group (or groups)". (Tajfel, 1981: 225) When people define themselves, they speak not only of personal characteristics, but of attributes potentially shared with a large number of other people.

These collective identities are also constructed through experience. G. H. Mead led social scientists to appreciate the interplay between self and society. He argued that meaning emerges from social interaction, thereby creating collective visions of identity. (Deaux, 1991) This *constructionist* approach emphasizes that identities are negotiated, defined and produced through social interaction. (Holstein & Miller, 1993) Stuart Hall argued a dynamic and positional conception of identity, speaking in terms of process, movement, change and conflict. In his view, identity "is not something which already exists transcending place, time, history, and culture." (Hall, 1990: 223) Identities are far "from being eternally fixed in some essentialist past". "[T]hey are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power... Identities are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past." (ibid: 223)

Based on this understanding, identities are fragmented, full of contradictions and ambiguities. The process of identity construction takes place within narrativity where stories of inclusion and exclusion take place. In this context, story-telling and the usage of language play a major role. This process is certainly apparent in nation-building. As Benedict Anderson has

pointed out, nations are imagined communities because "the members of even the smallest nation never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." (Anderson, 1989: 15) Since national identity does not exist independently of the narratives that speak of it, common stories make the feeling of communion possible. The writings of members of the nation, which blend as well as clash, draw upon innumerable centers of culture, ideological state apparatus and practices. This multiple character of sources and of different language styles mirror the cumulative nature of processes of self-constitution. Literature has a very constitutive historical aspect. In the process of identity formation the novel, for instance, becomes "a concretely historical narrative shaped by the real history of real nations." (Said, 1994a: 92) The historical element in fiction blurs the gap between the 'I' and the 'we', which, to a certain extent, become identical.

Identity construction does not occur only within the group to which one belongs. Identity is also formed through the interaction with alien others who may intend to form a counter-group. Therefore, it is about boundaries. The 'other' becomes "the medium by which we all but consciously define ourselves." (Hentsch, 1992: 192) In situations of inter-national encounters "[t]he symbolic image of one's own nation is tinged with ideas of security or insecurity depending on one's image of other nations." (Boulding, 1961: 112) Based on this understanding, self-representation, as a practice of self-constitution in the Palestinian context, has been a contingent category depending on the contextualized interaction between the self and others', mainly Zionist thought. Practices of self-constitution are continuous processes of constitution and reconstitution. The examination of the dynamics of self-presentation in the Palestinian experience may promote our understanding of the interaction between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives of identity formation in a complex reality in which the 'other' is in a constant attempt to manipulate Palestinian history and memory.

The Self as a Monolithic Revolutionary Hero

It is a well accepted notion that the Palestinian national movement in Mandate Palestine was organized along traditional lines, which was one of its crucial sources of weakness. Patrimonialism characterized the Palestinian national organizations, where the leader determined everything. In the wake of the movement's reorganization after the 1948 war, the Fatah movement, which began dominating the PLO following the War of 1967, sought to adopt a more modern and democratic form of organization. In one of its leaders' views, the movement needed to pay a great deal of attention to forming "a popular organization which could carry on no matter what happens to one leader or another". Fatah endeavored to construct an image of the "new

Palestinian," in order to motivate Palestinians to join the movement. (Turki, 1972: 99)

The new Palestinians were to emerge from those growing up in discontent with their oppressive surroundings. The contrast with the backward elders became a central theme in Palestinian national discourse. One Palestinian commented that the youngsters living in the refugee camps "were looking around for an outlet for their suppressed fury". Their goal was "to transform the distorted structure of the reality they saw around them in the Arab world." (Turki, 1972: 99) The discourse on the new Palestinian was revolutionary in nature. It involved change, breaking down the whole system in order to establish a new, experienced one. Hisham Sharabi viewed it as follows:

> the first days of resistance showed not only what human will could generate, but also affirmed revolutionary action as the only way to self-transformation. It became clear that nothing could free society from the shackles that bound it except the force stored in its oppressed and exploited masses. We saw the New Arab Man emerging in the shape of the Palestinian fida'iyeen. We envisaged the Arab revolution being born out of the Palestinians' resistance movement. (Sharabi, 1972: 38)

The transformation of the Palestinian image, from a poor refugee to a revolutionary hero, was directly connected to the rise of the resistance organizations. Palestinians in the refugee camps spoke about their rebirth as normal human beings after the rise of the resistance in Lebanon. "The Palestinian felt after the revolution that he was living as a normal person again after a life of humiliation" commented one Palestinian. (Sayegh, 1979: 202) People were again proud of their identity and felt as if they "had regained [their] identity, not just as Palestinians, but as human beings." (Sayegh, 1979: 204) Exile was identified with loss and lack of identity. It was also a lack of dignity, where the Palestinian had no control over his life. Identity was connected and bound to the territory of Palestine. As a result, regaining identity had to be coupled with resistance and struggle.

The image of the fida'i was crystallized in the newspaper that appeared secretly in the refugee camps in Lebanon at the end of the 1950s and beginning of 1960s. This newspaper was the voice of the new Palestinian who was supposed to replace the refugee. The paper declared that the life of the refugee is that of degradation and dishonor. Therefore, "the children of the disaster (the 1948 war) shall return to the battle more powerful, more dedicated and more sophisticated, learning from their experience. [They] shall reject this miserable and dirty life. This life that destroyed [their] literary, spiritual and political existence..." (Filastinuna, 1959: 10) The new Palestinian rises from the ashes of the past more aware of himself and his

surroundings. He is willing to sacrifice himself. He and she are "not sacrificing their lives for the sake of living in tents. They do it because they want to die as martyrs for the sake of liberating Palestine." (Filastinuna, 1960: 7) Sacrifice becomes an important symbol of the new Palestinian hero.

The heroic figure that ascended in the Palestinian political discourse of the 1960s was not individualistic. The myth of the hero included all those living under miserable conditions as a result of the dispersal. Heroism became a collective character, not a feature embodied in one person or another. It was elevated above any other social or moral duty and in the realm of the eternal. Time lost its relevance as a measuring factor in the lives of the potential heroes. Life was divided into past and future only. The present collapsed between memories and the aspiration to recreate the past in the future. The present was coupled with dishonor and shame at the loss.

The image of the fighter as a hero was also glorified in Palestinian literature of that period. (Abu Al-Shabab, 1977) In the words of the Palestinian writer Yihya Yachlif, the fida'i was the 'candle that lights up all that surrounds it'. In his book, *The Apple of Madness*, the fida'i is portrayed as a sun that sends its light/rays to illuminate the moon at night. The fida'i is depicted in a miserable existence, in which there is hardly anything to eat. The background is the refugee camp where people still carry their memories of the past. However, when the fida'i arrives, the table is mysteriously filled with all kinds of typical Palestinian food. His appearance is as mysterious as the source of the food. The fida'i is the only one who can recover what was lost in the past. Yachlif uses the same image in *The Song of Life*. Each of the figures in the story suffers a personal tragedy; but the worst is the common tragedy manifested in their daily lives where hunger and cold gnaw away at their bodies. They are attacked from all sides. They suffer attacks of the Israeli jets, the merciless weather and repeated storms, which destroy their calm and poor daily routine. In this environment, the fida'i Hamza stands out. He is unique in many aspects. He does not speak excessively, he acts. He is a young, energetic man, who does not sleep at night. He must watch the beach to warn others of any invasion from the sea;but Hamza is not a stranger, he is no different than the rest of the camp residents. He "carries his rifle on his shoulder, and emanates an essence of lemon and spice. He carries his rifle on his shoulder the way the falahun [farmers] carry their clapper". The fida'i embodies Palestine in himself, where the orchards of lemon and orange fill the air with their pungent fragrance. Hamza "walks full of carefulness, attention and caution " because he has the situation in hand. He is responsible for the security of the poor people around him. He is their last hope and resort.

Symbolism and the image of the fighter were social needs among the dispersed Palestinians. After 1948, many Palestinians from different villages and areas found themselves living together in refugee camps. This situation was described by Lutf Gantus: "Palestinian society ceased to be a society. It

lost its social bonds and the social connections that gave it its characteristics of belonging to the land, the village, the city, and the family for generations." (Gantus, 1965: 33) The image of the revolutionary fighter, willing to sacrifice himself to liberate Palestine and recover the homeland, was a source of identification for all and it played a very strong psychological role in transforming the state of despair of many Palestinians into feelings of responsibility and engagement. As one refugee said, "the people of the camps were waiting for the revolution in the way the thirsty land awaits water." (Sayegh, 1979: 188)

Heroism, as the best way out of confusion and life in the refugee camp, was portrayed most clearly in Gassan Kanafani's story *Returning To Haifa*. Kanafani, who lost his home in Akka and joined the resistance organizations in Lebanon, tried to portray the Palestinian's internal world. As the first Palestinian able to depict the dilemmas of the Palestinian in novels, Kanafani's works are a good tool for illustrating how the Palestinians viewed themselves at that period and how they wished to present themselves to the world. The story tells of Palestinians who try to return to their past home. It is a journey of the frightened soul into its being of the far gone past. Memories are the means of entry into that past, but they are riddled with fear and hesitation. The journey into the past is not taken for granted and Kanafani wants to free the Palestinians of their fears. The story's protagonists are a Palestinian couple who left Haifa in 1948, leaving their five months old child behind. After the second dispersal, in 1967, the couple decides to come back to Haifa to find out what happened to their child. Their son reappears as an adult, Israeli soldier who is reluctant to recognize his biological parents.

The past, as reflected in this story, is not romanticized as it was in other Palestinian stories or in the way it was described by refugees. Kanafani's past is tragic and full of agony. The yearning for Palestine is not essentially material. It is rather "a deep spiritual aspiration in the soul of every Palestinian Arab in exile." (Tibawi, 1963: 507) The only way that leads to return is a transformation of the self. Kanafani elevates the spiritual connection with Palestine above the material one. The following passage may clarify this relationship and the solution Kanafani proposes to the Palestinians. This passage is taken from the last part of the story after the couple have visited Haifa and met the child who they left behind in 1948.

> "I look for the real Palestine. Palestine that is more than a memory, more than a feather of....,more than a child, more than scrapes of a pencil on the stair case. I was telling myself: What is Palestine for Khalid (their son who was born in exile and joined the fida'iyeen, A. J.)? He does not know the vase, and not the picture, not the stairs, and not al-Halisa and Khaldun. Despite that, it is worth for him to carry the gun and to die for it. And for us, me and you, it is a mere looking for something under the dust of memory. Look what we found under the dust...more dust. We were mistaken when we considered the

homeland as past only. For Khalid the homeland is the future, that is how the departure was, and that is how Khalid wanted to carry the gun. Tens of thousands are like Khalid. They are not stopped by the running tears of men looking in the valleys of their defeat for their shattered shields and dispersed flowers. They look for the future and thereby correct our mistakes and the mistakes of the whole world. Dov (their child who was left behind, grew up as Jew and joined the Israeli army, A.J.) is our disgrace but Khalid is our remaining honor...Did not I tell you from the beginning that we should not have come...and that this needs war?" (Kanafani, 1986: 411-412).

The hero in Kanafani's story posits a dialectical relationship between self-awareness, action and self-transformation. The Palestinian self, as pictured by Kanafani, seeks to recount its return to, and reconciliation with, an original identity. The voyage of return represents the past "as it was" in a voice that insists on the need to remove oneself from history in order to invert it. There is an attempt to create a bridge between the past and the future not through the 'now', but rather through a process of awakening mingled with action. A united self is the key and the magic solution for the current situation of despair and degradation. Since the self is complete when it is combined with the land, the only course of action is to fight to recover the land. The same motif is clarified in the Palestinian national Covenant of the PLO from 1968 which declared in resolution number 4: "The Palestinian identity is a genuine, essential and inherent characteristic: it is transmitted from parents to children...". Identity was viewed in organic-biological terms which could not be transformed. Palestinian identity was viewed in territorial as well as parental terms.

Between Images and *Realpolitik*

The transformation of the Palestinian from refugee to fida'i, transformed Palestine into the 'revolution'. The latter received the characteristics of the former. The revolution was romanticized in the same way as Palestine. It became sacred and any disagreement with it was considered a discredit to and betrayal of Palestine. The two terms 'revolution' and 'Palestine' became interchangeable. In order to maintain the revolution an organization became necessary. Therefore, Palestine was transformed into the revolution that was transformed into the PLO. This process of political mutation culminated in a significant success with the decision of the 1974 Arab Summit in Algiers, which recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. However, at this moment, the fida'i lost to the bureaucrat. The spirit of the fighter was turned into static symbols incorporated in the rifle. The spirit of the revolution was assimilated into the organization. Its motivation was amalgamated with the leadership that

became indispensable to the revolution. In other words, the means were transformed into the goal. The revolutionary organization intended to consolidate the people and lead their struggle, became a goal in itself. It was mystified and made holy. Its holiness found fertile ground in the traditional Palestinian society that had experienced at least two tragic events of dispossession. In this society new "gods" were needed. Therefore, sacredness became a good mechanism for blocking criticism. After a short charismatic episode, the 'new Palestinian' became imprisoned within his own creation. The image of the revolutionary was exploited for internal political purposes. The various resistance organizations attributed the image to themselves as a tool of political hegemony.

Living in an unstable and suspicious political environment, the Palestinian image of the fida'i was confronted with three different, but basic, obstacles. The Palestinians had to fight Israel, to carve their place within the Arab political system and reconcile the revolutionary image with the traditional structure of Palestinian society. The identification of the Palestinian with the whole land of Palestine made it impossible to initiate any dialogue with Israel. Israel used the cliche 'there is nobody to talk to on the other side' for its political purposes. Palestinians were presented as terrorists and deliberately reduced to blood-thirsty, subhuman beings. (Harkabi, 1977)

For the Arabs, the image of the fida'i had a more complex impact. On the public level, many Arabs were influenced by the rise of the Palestinian fida'i. The success in the Al-Karameh battle, in which the fida'i organization inflicted heavy losses on an Israeli battalion brought many Arabs to join the resistance. (Chaliand, 1972) The Arab regimes, on the other hand, were not enthusiastic about the popularity of the Palestinian resistance. All Arab regimes paid tribute to the fida'iyon either by opposing political solutions with Israel or by providing substantial financial aid. However, this support encouraged the Arab regimes to seek influence within these organizations. (Quandt, Jabber & Lesch, 1973: 186-198) Although the policies of the various Arab regimes toward the Palestinians were not identical, the Palestinian communities in the Arab countries were punished when the resistance organizations were reluctant to go along with the policies of the ruling regime.

On the Palestinian level, the resistance organizations were very popular in refugee camps. The refugees were those who suffered most after the 1948 war, and were those who suffered the repressive policies of the host Arab countries. The rise of the resistance movement was a source of hope for them and, therefore, they were the first to embrace these organizations. However, since they constituted the Palestinian people's weakest community, they formed the organizations' human resource, but were not part of their leadership. There was a visible gap between refugee representation at the base level and their representation in the high echelons of the resistance organizations. (Sayigh, 1979: 208) The revolution did not penetrate society

and it produced a deep change in its structure. Therefore, the image of the fida'i was rendered impotent in the social realm. The revolutionary political consciousness did not touch upon social issues, but was limited to mere rhetoric. The fida'i was barred from society and not only in the physical sense.

The reality of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip differed. They had to face the Israeli occupation authorities after experiencing nineteen years of Jordanian rule. This experience had a moderating impact on the population. (Jamal, 1996) Being in daily contact with the Israeli authorities and experiencing the conflict from a different perspective, led them to urge the PLO to moderate its positions. People in the occupied territories leaned towards a certain form of a two-state solution to the conflict. The longer the Palestinians in these areas experienced Israeli occupation, the more militant they became and the more they came to believe in a historical compromise between the two sides. (Dakkak, 1983)

Debating the boundaries of the self

Following the rifts that began to surface in the "organic" congruence between the Palestinian personality and the land of Palestine, indifference began to emerge toward the unitary and monolithic image of the Palestinian fida'i. The reality was overwhelming and it seemed impossible to ignore the different internal and external pressures that raised questions with regard to the fighter self-concept. This self-concept was faced with the Palestinians' true capability to liberate Palestine by force. As a result, changes in self-understanding began to emerge. These changes did not transpire smoothly, and are still to be resolved. However, they constitute a clear process that will certainly have its implications in the future. The following pages will illustrate this change.

In his speech on November 13, 1974 in the United Nation General Assembly, Yassir Arafat presented the Palestinian as carrying the olive branch of peace in one hand, and the rifle of a rebel in the other. The unitary image of the Palestinian fighter was blended with other dimensions of personality which made it more complex. The Palestinian was no longer only the fighter, but also the diplomat who understands the human language of politics. The language of the Palestinian assumed not only the rifle, but also the word. The debate among Palestinians, no matter where they lived, developed into two different traditions of Palestinian nationalism (Sayigh, 1997). The first concerned those who insisted on the unitary image of the fighter and were not willing to compromise on the issue. For them, the only way to articulate the Palestinian national will was resistance by force. Liberation was their aim and the rifle was the means. This tradition was not constituted from one political organization or movement, rather an aggregate of different forces that viewed themselves as representatives of the authentic

Palestinian.[1] In their view, the diplomatic success of the PLO and the recognition accorded the organization, were a direct result of the armed struggle. Therefore, they accused others of "separating the diplomatic gains from the armed struggle and from the popular war... done despite the fact that the facts clearly show that success was achieved because of the Palestinian rifle." [2]

The second tradition viewed armed struggle in pragmatic terms. The image of the fida'i became a mobilizing trigger rather than a real entity. Representatives of this tradition spoke of intelligent struggle in which international circumstances should be taken into consideration. Therefore, diplomatic negotiations were considered a legitimate way to achieve the goals of the Palestinians. Supporters of this camp claimed that the Palestinians must learn from history and avoid a strategy of rejectionism in their struggle.[3] This view positioned the fida'i behind the diplomat and transformed the armed struggle into a tactic of extremists[4].

These two traditions found articulation in the relationship between the Palestinian people and the land of Palestine. Whereas the first tradition saw no possible compromise, but sought to liberate all the land of Palestine and establish an Arab state in it, the other tradition viewed the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, alongside Israel, a possible solution to the Palestinian problem. Whereas the first tradition articulated the views of those Palestinians living in refugee camps, the other tradition allied itself with the Palestinian bourgeois. The refugees were occupied with their past and their national consciousness was determined by the aspiration of return. A Palestinian woman living in a refugee camp in Lebanon articulated this yearning saying: "We absolutely refuse a state on the West Bank and Gaza...We want to go back to the territories occupied in 1948. Even if we all die, we will accept nothing less than to go back to our country".[5] Many of those living in exile would have agreed with the woman refugee who said: "Even if we were given land [in the West Bank or Gaza] we would not feel it was our motherland. I will not leave the camp until I can

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[1] The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) articulated these ideas in the 1970s and 1980s. The PFLP went along with Fatah inside the PLO, but always objected to the pragmatic line advanced by the latter. Hamas adopted a position close to those of the PFLP, after its establishment in 1988, despite the fact that the movement viewed the conflict with Israel in Islamic terms. On the PFLP's position see Matti Steinberg, 1988: 3-26. On the Hamas's position see Fathi Yakun. 1992.

[2] *Filastin Al-Thawra*, 29 June 1975, pp. 28-32.

[3] On this position, review the words of Salah Khalaf "Clear Views in Vague Circumstances", *Arab-Israel*, no. 2. 1974. (in Hebrew). See also Faysal Hourani. 1978.

[4] These views were articulated by two representatives of the PLO. See Said Hamami, "From a Strategy of Armed Struggle to a Strategy of Peaceful Coexistence". *Imda*, (Position). no. 10-11. Tel Aviv (September 1975). (in Hebrew). See also a similar view articulated by Issam Sartawi in Yediot Aharonot 12 April 1982.

[5] *New Outlook*, March-April 1975. p. 50.

move directly to Palestine". For this woman, being a Palestinian was based on her memories of a specific and tangible part of Palestine. For her, the aspiration to an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip does not correspond with her understanding of being Palestinian.

On the other hand, other Palestinians, many of whom live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, developed another understanding of their future. After the experience of occupation and the inability of the PLO leadership to generate a real process of liberation, Palestinian elites in the occupied territories began grasping the difficulty of 'rearabizing Palestine'. The operative consensus among many Palestinians, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and among the dominant bureaucratic, intellectual and political leadership of the PLO, became the establishment of a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Such a state was seen as "a tool for solving the Palestinian problem, for those who will inhabit it and those who will live elsewhere"[6].

The Multiple Self and the Seeds of Dissension

The gaps in social and political experience turned out to be stronger than the common suffering of most Palestinians in exile and under occupation. These gaps uncovered the growing differentiation between the different Palestinian communities and the resulting fragmentation in Palestinian self-perception. The confessional writings of several Palestinians who returned "home" after living in exile for a long time exposed a new awareness of a deep sense of estrangement. The attempt made by many Palestinians to enter history contained a counter-effect, which exposed, beside the human dimension of the Palestinian problem, the growing rift between self-understanding and self-representation in the different Palestinian experiences. The different experiences of the different Palestinian communities gave rise to an open debate on the self-concept, which differed from the debate that dominated the national discourse in the 1960s and 1970s. The works of Edward Said, who lives in the US, Fawaz Turki, who grew up in Beirut, experienced the life of a refugee camp and constantly moved from one place to another, and Raja Shehadeh, who lives in Ramallah, are representative of the 'new' Palestinian political discourse. Although one may claim that the three do not represent all the Palestinian people, there is no doubt that they do speak the language of national consciousness and seek to

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[6] Sabri Jiryis, *New Outlook*, September 1975.

portray a public image of what they conceive Palestinianness is all about. Their experience as Palestinians who are capable of self-reflexivity and critical self-portrayal make them illustrative of the dissemination of the counter-image of the coherent and monolithic self-concept produced in previous period of the Palestinian national endeavor.

In an article published in *The New Statesman* on May 11, 1979, Edward Said wrote:

> Zionism's genuine successes on behalf of Jews are reflected inversely in the absence of a major history of Arab Palestine and its people. It is as if the Zionist web of details and its drama choked off the Palestinians, screening them not only from the world but from themselves as well.

These words of Said reflected a growing awareness among Palestinians who began to grasp the importance of narrativity in the struggle against Israel.

A clear example of such reflections on Palestinian identity, exposing its increasing complexity, is Said's book, *After the Last Sky*. This book was written when Said was most involved in the PLO's diplomatic efforts to become an integral part of the peace efforts in the Middle East. His images of the Palestinians, as well as the descriptions of their everyday life, are clear reflections of his personal involvement in the search for clarity and place on the political, social and psychological levels. In photos and words, Said tries to escape the stereotype image of the Palestinian with the kalachnikov. He draws a realistic picture of the Palestinians as normal human beings who live miserable lives. He shows the real person behind the external form. The Palestinian becomes that person who is aware of his reality. He escapes the past and concentrates on the present. The image of the 'horrible terrorist' is left out and a new image of the realistic man emerges. Said complains that [t]o most people Palestinians are visible principally as fighters, terrorists, and lawless pariahs." (Said, 1986: 4) The Palestinians were politically invisible. They were ignored and existed only as individual terrorists who speak the language of the rifle and the bomb.

This image was exploited in the Israeli media and used to advance Israel's position in the world. Said was aware of the damage incurred by the monolithic image of the Palestinian as a fighter. Therefore, he subtly asserted that "[T]he multifaceted vision is essential to any representation of us." (Ibid: 6) In his view, the Palestinians are dogged by their past, but they have "created new realities and relationships that neither fit simple categories nor conform to previously encountered forms." (Ibid: 5) Aware of the impact of his work, Said states, from the beginning, that his book is intended to represent the real Palestinian. When one strips away this Palestinian's "occasional assertiveness and stridency ...[one] may catch sight of a much more fugitive, but ultimately quite beautifully representative and subtle, sense

of identity." (Ibid: 36) It is Said's task to perform this act of stripping away to expose the human dimension. Palestinian people are pictured in different situations, settings and timings to mirror their real situation. His approach has been to reflect the double vision inherent in the way Palestinians in exile view themselves. Examining the text, one notices that Said switches his use of pronouns, from 'we' to 'you' to 'they', to designate Palestinians. This broken manner reproduces the rupture in how Palestinians experience themselves. Said writes "as abrupt as these shifts are, I feel they reproduce the way 'we' experience ourselves, the way 'you' sense that others look at you, the way in your solitude you feel the distance between where 'you' are and where 'they' are" (Said, 1986, 5). In his view, the Palestinians do not have a "dominant theory of Palestinian culture, history, society; ...[they] cannot rely on one central image (exodus, holocaust, long march); there is no completely coherent discourse adequate to...[them], and [he] doubt[s] whether at this point, if someone could fashion such a discourse, [they] could be adequate for it." (Ibid: 129) These words portray the multifaceted images of the Palestinians that Said reiterates.

Along the lines of the Subaltern School of thought, Said challenges the essentializing official Palestinian political discourse exposing its weakness and establishing an alternative self-concept that is inherently plural and, as a result, more humane. He questions the authority of the official narrative to project a unitary self-identity by addressing a central problem in Palestinian political experience. According to his understanding, Palestinians experience their identity in different ways based on their suffering and struggle. In Said's view "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." (Ibid: 5) When speaking of the experience of those Palestinians who live in exile, not within a Palestinian community, Said says: "where no straight line leads from home to birthplace to school to maturity, all events are accidents, all progress is a digression, all residence is exile. [Palestinians] linger in nondescript places, neither here nor there; [they] peer through windows without glass, ride conveyances without movement or power." (Ibid: 20)

The world of Said is that of those who live nowhere and everywhere. They live in relative isolation because they do not live among fellow Palestinians. As a result, they have a different view of the world and of themselves. Their identity is based on blurred memories and indirect connection with fellow Palestinians. Based on his experience and the experience of exiled Palestinians like himself, Said asserts that he "found out much more about Palestine and met many more Palestinians than [he] ever did, or perhaps could have, in pre-1948 Palestine." (Ibid: 23) He expresses the predicament of the Palestinian experience saying,

> All of us speak of awdah, return, but do we mean that literally or do we mean we must restore ourselves to ourselves…The latter is the real point, I think, although I know many Palestinians who want their houses and their way of life back, exactly. But is there any place that fits us, together with our accumulated memories and experiences (Ibid.: 34).

Said admits that he would find it hard to live back in Palestine. He writes in this regard, "Exile seems to me a more liberated state but, I have to admit, I am privileged and can afford to feel the pleasures, rather than the burdens of exile (Said, 1994 b:199).

Said's attempt was followed by several Palestinian works which deal with Palestinian identity and the relationship between Palestinians and the land of Palestine. In his physical, as well as psychological journey back home, Fawaz Turki manages to picture the fragmented encounter between himself and the local Palestinians of the occupied territories. While walking through the streets of Ramallah and experiencing the life of the Palestinian residents, Turki reconstructs the hybridity of Palestinian reality. He expands "the particulars of his own life to enfold the universality of the Palestinian condition in general." (Turki, 1996)

Walking around the streets of Ramallah, Turki was enthusiastic about the idea that everyone around him was Palestinian. He articulated his feelings clearly saying:

> I can't believe all these people are Palestinians. Save for the few years that I spent in Haifa, before Palestine became Israel, I had never before been in a city, town, or village where everybody was Palestinian and where, in the overlapping energies, every Palestinian had somehow contributed to the ethos of the place. (Turki, 1994: 17)

Turki was so excited that he wanted to walk up to people and say, "Hey brother, I'm Palestinian too. I too grew up crying on the shoulders of a dispassionate world, screaming helpless jokes about our condition, building my naked fear into a sigh of self-destruction," *ex*cept Turki recognizes what the impact of such behavior would be and hints at the difference between him and "these Palestinians" who "would only look askance at [him]..." However, in his worst dreams, he did not imagine that the gap between him and his fellow Palestinians would be so wide. In one of his first encounters with a group of Palestinians at a friend's house, he sensed strangeness and alienation. The way he was received back home was not encouraging. He reacted with apologetic associations and self-reflection saying to himself:

> I don't look Palestinian. I don't talk or walk or carry myself like a Palestinian. Maybe I'm not Palestinian anymore. There is a way you

have when you're a Palestinian, even one who grew up in Western exile, that gives testimony to what you have thought in the dark, that other Palestinians can sense. I don't have that way about me anymore. They all look at me as if to ask: What is your truth? (Ibid.: page)

Turki articulates his disappointment, not so much in these people he had just met, as in his own hidden hope and expectation that he would be received as a 'regular' Palestinian. He answered himself querying: "How do you tell these people what your truth is"? Turki did not hesitate to answer immediately, and with a certain grief and suffering in his thoughts:

In my exile, I have suffered as much grief as you have. Unlike you, I address the world's emptiness with no homeground to support me. You can't imagine the barrenness of our dreamless life in exile, like a fire with no ash and no sparks. That's why I'm different from you. That is why I look and talk and walk and live differently. And that's why I'm back here, in this land, to confront you with my presence, to show you and myself that my reality is also real. (Ibid.: page)

Turki perceives his identity critically and is repulsed by many of the cultural norms of Palestinian society. He rejoices in his ability to be critical and resents whatever he does not like in his culture. While walking through the streets of Jerusalem, he reflects on his experience, saying:

I feel my past is spilling out in my encounters with ancient stones. Yet I offer this past no meek apology for the rupture I had made with it. I am a Palestinian, but also one who has come to believe that the spirit of Palestinian society will not become hot to the touch until Palestinians escape the prison of their moribund cultural norms. (Ibid: 31)

Being Palestinian is neither monolithic nor unitary in Turki's terms. He accentuates the differences between him and his friends in the West Bank in order to illustrate the complexity of Palestinian identity. The direction he wants this identity to take is also clear. For him "[t]he Palestinians are a human community, and like any other, it has the potential to break its traditional bonds and find its bearings in the modern world." (Ibid: 31) Turki admits the difference between people like him and those who experience occupation daily. He delineates the different dimensions of being Palestinian when he asserts:

I am a Palestinian exile by upbringing and an American leftist by choice. I am here to be one, if only for a moment, with the Palestinians who have never left Palestine. But I have to admit that to

be Palestinian, like them, is not like a glove that an exile can slip on at will. Nor can these people slip into my glove... Palestinians in the homeground are shaped by the irremediable suffering in their daily lives. I can no more pretend to feel the way they do about that suffering than they can afford a welcome to my way of being Palestinian. Our life experiences are simply too remote from one another. (Ibid: 33)

Self-representation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip takes on a different form and involves different images. People share the pain of suffering and are aware that no matter where you live or what your profession is, you are facing the same policy of oppression and dispossession. This accepted proposition leads to the delineation of the lines between 'us' (Palestinians) and 'them' (Israelis). Raja Shehadeh's books, *The Third Way*, written at the beginning of the 1980s and *The Sealed Room*, written in the early 1990s, draw on the experience of the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, no matter what their socio-economic status or religious affiliation. Shehadeh, who is a West Bank lawyer, exposes the common experience of women, peasants, lawyers and notables in facing occupation. He seeks what is common to these different people and elevates their experiences to a shared awareness of the cruelty of occupation. He is motivated by his feeling that "anger has gradually, through the years of occupation, given way to despair" (Shehadeh, 1982: 67) among the population. Shehadeh is aware that people in the occupied territories are giving up on a very resourceful defense mechanism in their struggle against the occupation authorities; that of discursiveness. In his view, "[a]nger fuels memory, keeps it alive. Without this fuel, you give up even the right to assert the truth. You let others write your history for you, and this is the ultimate capitulation." (Ibid: 67) Aware of his capabilities, Shehadeh, like Said, declares clearly: "We samidin cannot fight the Israelis' brute physical force but we must keep the anger burning - steel our wills to fight the lies. It is up to us to remember and record." (Ibid: 68) Palestinians write in order to contest the Israeli attempt to silence Palestinian suffering and omit their oppression from discourse. Writing becomes a potential method of struggle, enabling the Palestinian to attain a place in the world's public opinion that could be better than that which the rifle is able to achieve. To unveil the cruelty of Israeli policies and project the real picture of colonial rule Shehadeh expresses the daily experience of almost every Palestinian. On one occasion he reveals the impossible Palestinian situation under occupation by refering to the period of the second Gulf war when Israeli authorities refused to deliver gas masks to the Palestinians. Shehadeh describes in tens of pages what the Palestinians underwent and experienced during this war, emphasizing the lies and manipulations of Israeli officials who portray Palestinians in essentialized

patterns that promote Israel's moral image in the world. Expressing the state of the Palestinians in this period Shehadeh writes:

> We Palestinians are like the extra and unwanted members of a team. We never get counted so we keep our ears close to the ground and try to catch up with what the world is doing. Sometimes the others go one way, and we do the exact opposite because we were too far back to hear what was being said and no one bothers to tell us. When the team gets its gear, we are given nothing and have to make do with what we can get our hands on (Shehadeh, 1992, 94).

Unlike Said and Turki, Shehadeh escapes any crystallized image of the self and does not return to the past except for short glimpses. He leaves the boundaries of identity open because, for him, as expressed in his style of writing, there are no closed and predetermined preconditions to being a Palestinian. The antagonism with the Israeli occupation is what draws the borders of Palestinian identity. He tries to recreate the conflictual construction of identities in the area, thereby focusing on the interstices in and between occupier and occupied. He is aware of the strategic importance of the intervening spaces of cultures and the ambivalence of the borderlines of identities. (Bhabha, 1990) The Palestinians' identity is defined by their *Sumud*, steadfastness, in face of Israeli policies of oppression, dispossession and deprivation. *Sumud*, as depicted by Shehadeh, is a situation of ambivalence. The *Samid* has to face the powerful hand of Israel knowing that s/he cannot beat it. It is not easy to be a *samid*, despite the fact that some people do it of their own free will, even though they may have an alternative. Shehadeh testifies that he had the opportunity to flee the occupied territories several times while on a journey to Europe, where he could have stayed. He, like many other Palestinians, decide to come back and be a *Samid* by choice wondering "it is strange coming back like this, of your own free will, to the chains of *sumud*." (Shehadeh, 1982: 56)

It is not the memories of Said or the revolutionary urge of Turki that make the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza identify themselves as *samidun*. It is the contact with the home ground, the ability to enjoy the hells of the homeland and breathe its air. It is the bulldozers of occupation which plant the love for the land beside the anger at the aggression of the settlers. "[T]he beauty of the hills and the olives ... become symbols of [the Palestinian] people" and the fear of their loss extends the horizons and awareness of Palestinians based on their connection to the land. This connection is transformed into symbols of being and existence in the world. Antagonism with occupation becomes a basic source of national symbolism, which is used as the cornerstone of an imagined community. Shehadeh admits to himself that "somehow, something important about the way we *samidin* experience our land is not brought out in the war of words waged between

Jews and Palestinians." (Ibid: 85) The fear of robbery awakens the connection between the people and the land. The connection takes on new symbolic forms because "[b]efore the occupation there was no national symbolism and cohesion specifically connected with the West Bank". The rise of such symbolism delineates boundaries between Jews and Palestinians. It also gives shape to the differences between those Palestinians who are drawn by symbolism of the land of the West Bank and those who build their national images on memories and the dream of returning to their original villages and cities.

The difference between those suffering the daily burdens of occupation and those living in the Arab world, albeit as refugees, is captured by Shehadeh in a dialogue with a Palestinian friend of his who lives in Jordan and came to visit him on his birthday. Upon his arrival, Shehadeh's friends start complaining about the impossible situation in the West Bank where people have no real options to live a normal life. Shehadeh expresses his friend's complaints as follows:

> And what the hell did I come here for anyway?...Why did you drag me to this drab place, what is there here for anyone? Why don't you come to Amman - I'd give you the time of your life. We have cinemas, foreign restaurants, night-clubs. Again and again he'd asked me why I never visit him, and I would answer: I don't go to Amman. He did not, and would not, understand why. How could I tell him that seeing Palestinians in the Jordanian capital, men who have grown rich and now pay only widely patriotic lip-service to our struggle, was more than my sumud in my poor and beloved land could stomach? (Ibid: 8)

The conversation between Shehaheh and his friend reflects the gap between the abnormality of the samidun's life under occupation and the fact that some Palestinians, mainly middle class, were able to reestablish normal lives in exile. Shehadeh does not stop at criticizing those Palestinians for not recognizing the situation in which their brethren live under occupation. He views them as sharing the responsibility of misrepresenting the Palestinian problem and the impossible situation under Israeli occupation.

Shehadeh mirrors the hard situation under occupation best when he expresses his fears of an Iraqi gas attack on Israel during the second Gulf war.

The world is concerned about the gassing of the Jewish state, with all that this evokes in the collective memory of the world in the post-Holocaust era, and I am here, in the midst of the Jewish state. If god forbid, it should be gassed, Israeli Jews will be saved, and I, and the other million and a half hapless Palestinians, the victims of the Jewish state, will be the ones who will be gassed to death. But there is no tragedy allowed to the Palestinians; the

West withholds significance from our peril and our tragedy (Shehadeh, 1992: 109).

Frustrated with his reality, Shehadeh portrays the world's injustice towards the Palestinian tragedy. In the same previous context he complains:

> For years we have been deemed the main international terrorists; we are now as bad as the Iraqis who are bad because the have occupied another country – we whose country is occupied. It brings one to the point of despair. It's as though someone is always there holding the brush and looking for ugly images with which to portray the Palestinians. (Ibid: 99).

These words of Shehadeh express the tragic reality of Palestinians under occupation. They expose the human side of a people under colonial rule, suffering from hypocritical treatment. They are components of a subjective practice of self-constitution in which an alternative image of the Palestinians is exposed and presented to the world.

Concluding Remarks

Following the discursive analysis outlined above, one can draw several conclusions. It became evident that there is a clear connection between place and identity. One presents him/herself according to the concrete interaction between the self and others in concrete circumstances. Identity is a relational category that is transformed according to context and is constructed through experience. The experience of refugees, differing from that of the middle-class Palestinians, has attracted different images of the self. In the refugees' eyes, the struggle was based on the development of a revolutionary consciousness and monolithic identity. In the eyes of middle-class, educated Palestinians, there was a clear need for normalization of the Palestinian identity to make the achievement of the national aspirations possible.

After their dispersal, the Palestinians were denied the opportunity of taking responsibility for their problem. However, the existential circumstances have led them to develop self-images based on their wishful aspiration to reestablish themselves in their homeland. Palestinian identity was identified with dispersal and loss. The refugee became the archetype of the Palestinian whether he/she lives in a refugee camp, in a rented apartment in Beirut or in a villa in Kuwait. This image was utilized for political mobilization. As a result, the refugee became a fighter who was willing to sacrifice his life to return home. Despite the fact that most Palestinians did not take part in the real transformation, the image of the fida'i became hegemonic in the Palestinian political discourse. However, this did not last long. Local

events imposed themselves on the political discourse which began to reflect a differentiation process among the different Palestinian communities.

In other words, Palestinian practices of self-constitution began to appear more influenced by the existential reality of the different communities than by the shared past in Palestine. This development led to the diversification of the Palestinian self-image which became multiple, sometimes even antagonistic. The shared experience in Palestine before 1948 which formed a positive definition of the Palestinians as a whole, vanished with time. The differential Palestinian reaction to the Oslo agreement forms a good illustration of the assertion that the attempts to construct an identity based on the sense of loss and the aspiration to return could not sustain collective practices of self-constitution. Although the split between supporters and opposers of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process does not correspond to geographical lines, the categorical differences between the reactions of the majority of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the vast majority of the Palestinian communities living outside the borders of historic Palestine, demonstrate the decline of the centrality of the shared collective memories and images in shaping political aspiration and reflecting a common self-understanding of being Palestinian.

The multifaceted images of the self presented in this illustrative study and the growing differentiation among them reflect a process in which individual Palestinians seek to escape the dominant self-concept promoted in the official national discourse. The plurality of self-constitution practices reject the hierarchies embedded in the national discourse. Turki's comments on Palestinian reactions to his book may prove to be illustrative in this context. In his view, Palestinian society

> is a society whose values and leaders, whose tradition and norms, are collaboratively engaged in mounting an assault directed at those processes by which Palestinians seek to affirm their self-definitions as individuals, to hear the echo of their true national self, to escape the brutalities and monotonies of patriarchy, and to find, finally, the clearing where they could gather their splintered social being into some kind of inviolate order. (Turki, 1996: 76)

Although this may be viewed as a personal overreaction, Turki's words represent counter discourse that seek to escape replications of the colonial mind embedded in national discourse.

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