



RSC Working Paper No. 28

Palestine Online: An Emerging Virtual Homeland?

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September 2005

This paper was originally submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Forced Migration at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford

Working Paper Series

Department of International Development
Queen Elizabeth House
University of Oxford

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

'If we think of Palestine as having the function of both a place to be returned to and of an entirely new place, a vision partially of a restored past and of a novel future, perhaps even a historical disaster transformed into a hope for a different future, we will understand the word's meaning better' (Said 1980: 125).

1.1 An Emerging Virtual Homeland?

In 1980, Edward Said wrote that the lives of Palestinian refugees 'have been made unbearable because they have no roots where they are now. Their horizons are formed by international agencies like the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), by refugee camps in one or another Arab country' (Said 1980: 131) and by a Western media not tuned in to their voices. His words are no less true a quarter of a century later. The recent proliferation of websites and online forums created for, by, and about Palestinians and through which Palestinians have gained access to a global audience may thus be marking a revolutionary expansion in the way Palestinians define 'their horizons'. Prompted by Palestinians' recent occupation of corners of cyberspace as a new terrain on which to conduct their struggle, this paper is an inquiry into the possibility of the existence of a virtual Palestinian homeland online. It traces the initial process of inscription of the land of Palestine with the meaning of 'homeland' at the turn of the twentieth century, comparing that process with Palestinians' online activities. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's theory of storytelling (1936) and Pierre Nora's concept of the distinction between *lieux* and *milieu de memoire* (1989), I assess how Palestinians' storytelling practices of 'emplacement' several generations before exile inform our understanding of Palestinian refugees' storytelling in cyberspace today.

I argue that, while insufficient to replace Palestinians' original homeland or to satisfy their current political aspirations, 'virtual Palestine' does exist and offers a window into possible visions of a future homeland as expressed by Palestinians not usually heard from. As a newly centralized space in which storytelling takes place, the Internet also provides scattered Palestinians with a place where new senses of belonging are forged and, most importantly, with a forum to define the terms by which they make political claims for a territorial Palestinian homeland, off-line.

The paper is divided into five sections. The second half of this introduction provides some historical background and briefly brings this up to date. In Section Two I set out the theoretical framework of the paper, first outlining the limitations of how 'homeland' and place/space are conceptualized in refugee studies. Informed by the notion put forth by Hammond, Turton and Appadurai that 'work' is necessary to give spaces meaning and turn them into places, I discuss how the practice of storytelling (as defined by Benjamin, 1936) 'emplace' space through the creation of memory (Nora 1989). I proceed to establish the Internet as an 'emplaceable' space by combining Augé's concept of 'non-place' and Levinson's analysis of the 'architecture' of cyberspace. In the last part of the Section I discuss Khalidi's argument that Palestinian national identity – and the 'emplacement' of Palestine as the Palestinian homeland – developed at the turn of the twentieth century through what Anderson calls 'print capitalism' (Anderson 1991). As many Palestinians at that time were illiterate, I highlight the recently documented practice of storytelling-cum-group reading that made this 'emplacement' possible for a large segment of the population.

Section Three describes the shift from storytelling to history-telling that occurred among Palestinian refugees after the 1960s, showing the historical contingency of the way – and great variety with which – collective memory has been reproduced over the last five decades. As a Palestinian national resistance movement grew, a monolithic national historical narrative subsumed the particularistic storytelling of older generations. Political changes in the late 1980s have brought a return to storytelling, but because Palestinians are scattered, this practice did not have a single, centralized space to ‘emplace’ until recently. The Section thus presents cyberspace as the new common space for storytelling among Palestinians, asking whether this space is indeed ‘emplaceable’.

Section Four takes Palestinian-made website *Palestineremembered.com* as a case study to argue that cyberspace *is* ‘emplaced’ through Palestinian storytelling online. I further propose that it is emplaced as a place in which Palestinians belong, while others are ‘visitors’, making it a ‘virtual Palestine’. Given Palestinian history in the twentieth century and Palestinians’ continued desperate situation, however, I maintain that ‘virtual Palestine’ is no replacement for a territorial Palestinian homeland. The concluding Section therefore calls for further research into what visions of a future homeland and what political aspirations are represented in Palestine online, while offering some initial thoughts.

1.2 Historical Background

From the sixteenth century until World War I Palestine was an integral part of the Ottoman Empire. Between 1839 and 1876, the Ottoman Administration reformed its provinces through what were called the Tanzimat (Cleveland 2000: 81-101), changing taxation, administration, land ownership, and education. The educational reforms are particularly important to this paper (see Section Two), as they expanded literacy among Palestine’s Arab inhabitants (Pappe 2004: 32), an expansion which was crucial to the development of Palestinian national identity in following decades (Khalidi 1997).

As, on the eve of World War I, the Empire began to crumble, ‘European powers began to vie for control of the Arab Ottoman provinces’ (Chatty 2005: 13). With the establishment of the League of Nations, Palestinians were recognized as an independent nation and placed ‘provisionally’ under British Mandate. When, in 1922, the League issued the Mandate, it incorporated the Balfour Declaration supporting Zionist aims into its articles, it created a paradox in the Mandate. On the one hand, it recognized Palestinians as an independent nation with the right to self-determination; on the other, it ‘allowed Great Britain to consult with the Jewish Agency on matters of land, Jewish immigration to Palestine and settlement, without referring to or consulting with the indigenous Palestinian people’ (Chatty 2005: 14; see also Cleveland 2000: 240-1).

While Jews had lived in Palestine beside Muslims and Christians in relative peace for centuries (Pappe 2004: 14), the late 1800s had seen the first in a series of waves of Jewish immigrants seeking to realize Zionist hopes of a home in Palestine specifically for the Jews (Cleveland 2000: 235; Pappe 2004: 39).

Over the next three decades, the Jewish percentage of the population of Palestine altered dramatically: in 1931, the Jewish population made up sixteen percent. Within five years it had risen to twenty-eight percent, and by 1946 it stood at thirty-one percent (Cleveland 2000: 249). Between 1946 and 1948 the number of Jews further increased to 700,000, or about one third of the total population of about 2,115,000 (Chatty 2005: 14; Cleveland 2000: 261).

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 181, a Partition Plan, by which a Jewish state would comprise 56.4% of the territory and a Palestinian Arab state would comprise 42.8%, with Jerusalem as an international zone. The day after Resolution 181 passed, 'armed conflict spread throughout Palestine' and Zionist 'Plan D' designed to 'to cleanse the future Jewish state of as many Palestinians as possible' (Pappe 2004: 130) was implemented. Following the 1948 massacre by Zionist paramilitary organizations in the village of Deir Yassin, 'the Arab states assembled in an Arab League to consider intervention in Palestine.' But, by the time they intervened, most of the major cities and towns in Palestine had already fallen under the Haganah and other Jewish militias' (Chatty 2005: 15; see also Pappe 2000: 132).

Nearly four hundred Palestinian villages were wiped out by Israel during the violence (Pappe 2004: 136). After the inhabitants were forced to flee or killed, each village was 'blown up and destroyed' (Pappe 2004: 137). Tantura was one of these villages. On May 22, 1948 the village's 1,500 men and women were taken to a nearby beach, where two hundred men between the ages of thirteen and thirty were massacred. 'There are similar incidents,' Israeli historian Ilan Pappe tells us, 'in many other locations...' (Pappe 2004: 137). On 15 May 1948 Ben Gurion declared the establishment of the state of Israel. The Palestinians were defeated:

Henceforth, 1948 marked two contrasting historical experiences: for the Zionists, it was the culmination of the dream of creating a state for world Jewry, as a means to put an end to European anti-Semitism; for Palestinians it was the time of expulsion and destruction of their land and society' (Chatty 2005: 15).

Between 1947 and 1948 about 700,000 Palestinians fled their homes, farms and businesses in Palestine (Chatty 2005: 5). Only 160,000 of about 850,000 Palestinians living in the territories designated by the UN as a Jewish state remained on or nearby their land and homes, becoming the Palestinian minority in Israel (Pappe: 2004: 138).

Pappe describes the eeriness of the following year, when 'winter was over and the spring of 1949 warmed a particularly frozen Palestine.' The land:

... had changed beyond recognition. The countryside, the rural heart of Palestine, with its colourful and picturesque villages, was ruined. Half of the villages had been destroyed, flattened by bulldozers which had been at work since August 1948 when the government had decided either to turn them into cultivated land or to build new Jewish settlements on their remains. A naming committee granted the new settlements Hebraized versions of the regional Arab names (Pappe 2004: 139),

Safad became Zvat, Lubyia Lavi, and so on.

Palestinian refugees took refuge in camps 'set up by the Red Cross and other humanitarian agencies in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt' (Chatty 2005:12; see also Cleveland 2000: 331), while a lucky few reached the Persian Gulf States (Pappe 2004: 145). In 1949 the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was established as the special agency whose task would be to 'manage Palestinian refugee camps and provide health, education and humanitarian aid' (Chatty 2005: 12). Though UNRWA's establishment was an expression of the international assumption that the Palestinian refugees would soon return to their homes, the previous year the Israeli Cabinet had already adopted a plan to prevent Palestinian refugees from returning, while the Arab governments refused to integrate them (Chatty 2005: 12).

Chatty and Hundt write that '[t]he majority of Palestinans believed their expulsion would end in a matter of days – at most a few weeks. Most had not carried their belongings with them and

many had left their doors open' (Chatty 2005: 15). Their accommodations in the camps were 'built from temporary materials, mainly clay, instead of the traditional stone, which encapsulated the refugees' transitional states and highlighted their anticipation of soon being repatriated, as laid down in UN Resolution 194' (Pappe 2005: 143). By May 1949, Palestinian refugees had disappeared from the international agenda.

In subsequent decades, Palestinians would be displaced again. During the Arab-Israeli War in 1967, Israel occupied the remaining twenty-two percent of Palestine, 'namely the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as other Arab territory... approximately 350,000 Palestinians were uprooted from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – over half of them for the second time' (Chatty 2005: 16; see also Pappe 2004: 188). When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 thousands more Palestinians in Lebanese camps were killed and displaced. The Gulf War in 1990-91 resulted in further displacement from Arab countries, estimated at 350,000. In the mid-1990s, Lybia evicted its Palestinian community of some 30,000 as well (Chatty 2005: 16). Numbering over four million (UNRWA), today's Palestinians represent the greatest number of refugees worldwide after the Afghans (Chatty 2005: 12).

1.3 Palestinians Today

1993 and the Oslo process signalled a period of disillusionment for Palestinians outside the West Bank and Gaza, as it put aside the hope of return for Palestinian refugees (Chatty 2005: 2; Cleveland 2005: 491). Today, Palestinians in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan experience varying degrees of social discrimination, political disempowerment, and economic disadvantage. Many have been stateless since 1948 (Chatty 2005: 8, 10; Pappe 2004: 145). Except in Jordan, none had rights to citizenship until 1995, when Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank gained the right to have Palestinian passports from the Palestinian Authority. Chatty and Hundt's recent research has shown that it 'is this group of Palestinian refugees that feels particularly isolated and removed from the central core of current activity and negotiation.' The recent Geneva Accords propose to do away with the 'right of return' altogether, which has only exacerbated this sentiment (Chatty 2005: 8).

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 How a Land Becomes a ‘Homeland’: Limits of Refugee Studies

2.1.1 *Limited readings of ‘homeland’*

Over the past two decades, the field of refugee studies has emerged to fill the conspicuous gaps left by older disciplines on the topic of forced migration. Crucially, these studies point to the difficulties faced by displaced populations in recreating homes and livelihoods upon return or resettlement, and to their frequent treatment as ‘victims’ by governmental and non-governmental actors. However, most tend to rely on unproblematic conceptions of ‘home’ and ‘homeland’ to which forced migrants do or do not want to return, and which they do or do not long for. Seconding Richard Black’s argument, David Turton suggests that the explanation for this lies in a ‘dependence... on policy definitions and concerns’ (Turton 2004: 24). With a focus on the ‘physical and productive properties’ (Rodgers 2002: 24) of places occupied, or missed, by the displaced, there is seldom an attempt to question, in other words, what local practices, ideas, national and colonial policies may have gone into investing of a given territory with the meaning of ‘homeland’; information which could, in turn, be critical in improving policies addressing displacement.

Whereas ‘homecomings of the past were associated with difficulties which had not been effectively dealt with’ (Allen and Turton 1996: 2), these difficulties are often understood within a simplistic ‘homeland’ – ‘exile’ binary. In Allen and Turton’s seminal study of repatriation in East Africa *In Search of Cool Ground*, Kibreab illustrates this binary with reference to Eritreans in Sudan: ‘In spite of their host’s hospitality, most were living in poverty and longed to return to their homeland’ (Kibreab 1996: 58). In the same volume, Selassie laments that ‘[t]housands of [Eritrean] children have grown up in these camps, and many have never visited their homeland’ (Selassie 1996). Throughout the volume, ‘home’ and ‘homeland’ are associated with anything from ‘country of origin,’ ‘area of origin,’ to constellations of households, as in Jonothan Bascom’s ‘Reconstituting Households and Reconstructing Home Areas.’ Similarly, in Allen’s study of Ugandans returning from Sudan, he writes that when the invading soldiers did not attack as expected, ‘most [Ugandans] returned home’ (Allen 1996: 226), though upon returning many ‘refugees found that their home area had been devastated’ (Allen 1996: 240).

2.1.2 *De-Territorialized Identity / Belonging*

Hammond’s *This Place Will Become Home*

With her ethnography on Ethiopian refugees, *This Place Will Become Home*, Laura Hammond joins a growing number of social scientists (see for example Malkki 1995) who insist on the disassociation of culture from place as ‘naturally’ linked, ‘questioning the commonly held belief that refugees who return to their country of origin are necessarily people “going home”’ (Hammond 2004: 3). To tease out some of the concepts embedded in the ‘homeland’ – ‘exile’ binary, Hammond focuses on ‘the act of forging a relationship between person (individual or collective) and place’ (Hammond 2004: 80), a process she dubs ‘emplacement’ and opposes with displacement. Exploring how refugees invest meaning in their surroundings, she contrasts ‘space,’ as the ‘geographical topography that is new and unfamiliar to the people in question’ with ‘place.’ Place she defines as ‘any kind of space that people, through their everyday lives, use, appropriate, and reflect on, thereby generating meaning through practice and association... imagination, visualization, narration, performance, and even policy formation’ (Hammond 2004: 82). She then goes on to delineate the dialectical relationship between the production of refugees’ identities and their conceptions of the spaces they occupy.

Turton

In Oxford's May 2004 Colson Lecture Turton commented that 'those who write about the displaced have, with a few notable exceptions, not exactly welcomed with open arms the burgeoning anthropological literature on the construction and maintenance of a sense of place' (Turton 2004: 4). He insisted that we must treat place 'not as a stage upon which social activity is carried out, but as a product of social activity' (Turton 2004: 22). Also like Hammond, he seeks to uncouple fixed placement on a physical territory from identity, a point he summarized in relation to the Mursi: 'Those who moved were, in this sense, more Mursi than those who stayed' (Turton 2004: 23). But it is the connection between 'homeland' as it is perceived in refugee studies and the development of nationalism that is crucial to this paper. For it is only through this connection that we can understand how the places of origin of the displaced become invested with the sacred meaning of homeland to begin with, before flight. A central, and perhaps most important question driving my inquiry is whether it might be possible to speak of the construction of new 'virtual' homelands – new spaces made into places with the same certainty we use to speak of the construction of new 'homes' and livelihoods, after displacement but before return.

2.2 'Homeland' and How Spaces Become Meaningful

2.2.1 *Making space into place, 'locality' production and 'emplacement'*

Theories of place similar to what Hammond calls 'emplacement' have, over the past decade, become a hot topic among anthropologists interested in modernity and the nation-state. Of these, Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* is one of the most commonly cited texts in refugee studies. Most important for our understanding of the construction of 'homelands' is Appadurai's argument that 'the transformation of spaces into places requires 'work'.' Concerned with the 'efforts of the modern nation-state to define all neighbourhoods under the sign of its forms of allegiance and affiliation' (Appadurai 1997: 189), he writes:

... it works by policing its borders, producing its people... constructing its citizens, defining its capitals, monuments, cities, waters and soils, and by constructing its locales of memory and commemoration, such as graveyards and cenotaphs, mausoleums and museums. (Appadurai 1997: 189)

But with the 'growing disjuncture between territory, subjectivity, and collective social movement' (Appadurai 1997: 189) other 'work' is also underway transforming other spaces – territorial and non-territorial – into new types of 'neighbourhood'. I am interested, here, in the kinds of 'work' involved in these modern 'emplacements' and how they relate to territorially local practices of 'emplacement' characteristic of times past.

2.2.2 *Inscribing space with meaning through building collective memory: storytelling*

Implicit in Appadurai's theory of 'locality' production, as in the research of scholars like Hammond and Turton focusing on the 'work' done by the displaced, is the importance of narrative in the production of a 'sense of place'. For it is narrative, in the form of the telling of national history, that gives meaning to the state's 'locales of memory and commemoration.' Some of the most important contributors to the understanding of place in refugee studies (Hirschon 2001; Parkin 1999; Malkki 1995; Rodgers 2002) highlight 'the telling and retelling of stories' as a fundamental component in 'place-making practices'. As Hammond's explication of the relationship between place and identity shows:

[w]henver the members of a community speak about their landscape – whenever they name it, or classify it, or evaluate it, or move to tell stories about it – they unthinkingly represent it

in ways that are compatible with shared understandings of how, in the fullest sense, they know themselves to occupy it. (Hammond 2004: 100)

As we will see, storytelling is especially important to the case of Palestinian refugees.

The next sub-section introduces the relevant arguments put forth by Benjamin and Nora about storytelling, memory and ‘emplacement’. It is followed by the proposal that cyberspace is a space that, like a village, refugee camp or country, can also be inscribed with meaning, or ‘emplaced’.

Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Storyteller’

The importance of storytelling to emplacement derives, for Benjamin, from three key characteristics. First, Benjamin argues that a true storyteller is a traveller, on the one hand, but is also bound to the land (is local) – uniquely placed to talk about the distant or regional from a local perspective and the local from a distant or regional perspective.

Second is the importance of “being there” to hear the story derives from the interactiveness inherent in storytelling, manifest in the fact that the audience participates, through comment, interruption and interpretation. The act of storytelling relies, Benjamin writes, on ‘the ability to exchange experiences’ (Benjamin 1936: 83), whereby each participant in a moment of storytelling leaves what he calls “traces” of his or her own experiences on the story while those traces, in turn, become the story itself. As I discuss in Section Four, Benjamin’s ‘description’ – ‘explanation’ dichotomy may be somewhat dubious. Storytelling demands the participation of its audience because it remains ‘free from explanation as one reproduces it’ (Benjamin 1936: 89), asking for its audience’s interpretations of events as they are described.

Third is that storytelling has the power to ‘emplace’ the space where it is performed because it creates *memory*. As each participant excretes traces in the form of interpretation and comment, he also retains the story being told so that it becomes his own experience, as memory:

... the listener’s naive relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told. The cardinal point for the unaffected listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story. Memory is the epic faculty par excellence. (Benjamin 1936: 97)

This act of memory-creation constitutes, for Benjamin, a creation of collective experience: ‘The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale’ (Benjamin 1936: 87). This point on memory is, for my argument, Benjamin’s most important and it is on this point that Pierre Nora’s work on memory (and history) helps us connect storytelling, memory and place-making.

Pierre Nora’s ‘Between History and Memory’

Unlike history, Nora argues, ‘Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things.’ Memory is a ‘perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present... vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation’ (Nora 1989: 8, 9). It is with the idea of memory as ‘perpetually actual’ and ‘vulnerable to manipulation’ that its relation to storytelling becomes apparent. Like a story being told, memory is an interactive, ever-changing process. And, as a process unlike history, it cannot but take root in people and places, so as to be re-visited, reproduced.

Nora is referring to memory in its ‘pre-modern’ context, as it existed before ‘the obsession with archiving that marks our age,’ an age that collects ‘remains, testimonies, documents, images, speeches, any visible signs of what has been.’ If ‘pre-modern’ memory does not take root in ‘remains’ and ‘documents,’ it must take root, of its own accord, in the people and places where it is formed. That memory can be formed ‘of its own accord’ this way, without the prompting of an ‘obsession with archiving,’ Nora attributes to the existence of *milieux de memoire*, environments of memory. Because memory is being subsumed by history, he argues, such *milieux* are ever fewer, replaced increasingly by *lieux de memoire*, which are ‘fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it’ (Nora 1989: 12-14).

His emphasis on the ‘pre-modern’ (or pre-archival) nature of memory implies that memory emerges out of the exchange, in a given place, of stories. It is no wonder that he bemoans the decline of memory in the face of monumental and archival history, as though echoing Benjamin’s lamentation of the decline of storytelling with the ascent of the novel.

It is thus because Nora links memory with the non-archival exchange of experiences (i.e. storytelling) and with place (‘the concrete... spaces...’) that he characterizes ‘peasants,’ the people most intimately tied to place, to their land, as a ‘quintessential repository of collective memory’ (Nora 1989: 7). For in France, the place from which he draws his examples, it is the disappearance of such peasants that most marks the replacement of the ‘pre-modern’ with the ‘modern’ age. Palestinian websites indicate, however, that his strict opposition of memory and history finds its ultimate caveat in storytelling’s most recent incarnation online (see Section Four).

2.2.3 *Media as place*

If the ‘pre-modern’ has been subsumed by modernity, traditional notions of ‘emplaceable’ spaces through such practices as storytelling must be rethought. Neither Benjamin, writing in 1936, nor Nora, writing in 1989, could have taken into account the massive changes the Internet would produce. Strangely, though, scholars who have experienced the cyber-boom firsthand have also had trouble assimilating it into their work. So, while those studying displaced populations are in the most urgent position to understand how scattered groups maintain their ties, mobilize politically and continue to negotiate their identities online, few in refugee studies have written about cyberspace. Those who have, as Ananda Mitra has in researching Indian diaspora web forums, have concentrated on the types of community formed, long distance, through cyberspace (Mitra 2000). Like Mitra’s study, most such research assumes the existence of ‘virtual communities,’ but does not go so far as to conceive of cyberspace as a place, in itself, in which these communities invest meaning.

While Appadurai recognizes ‘virtual neighbourhoods, no longer bounded by territory, passports, taxes, elections, and other conventional practical diacritics’ (Appadurai 1997: 195), he does so more with an eye towards how they ‘affect many areas of life, from philanthropy to marriage’ (Appadurai 1997: 195) than how, in themselves, they constitute new locations where “life” occurs. He is, then, still bound to traditional notions of territorial place. Given my focus on the possibility of there being a ‘virtual homeland’ online, the next sub-section establishes the possibility of a de-territorialized (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), even ‘virtual’ notion of place.

Marc Augé – ‘non-places’ as objects of inquiry

Encouraged by Marc Augé’s *Non-Places: Anthropology of Supermodernity* I take what may seem like a leap – into cyberspace. Augé insists that we attend to ‘the multiplication of what we

call ‘non-places,’ in opposition to the sociological notion of place, associated by Mauss and a whole ethnological tradition with the idea of a culture localized in time and space’ (Augé 1995: 34). Along with motorways, service stations, and airports, he classifies the Internet, ‘the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extraterrestrial space,’ as a non-place worthy of attention (Augé 1995: 79). Quoting Descombe’s definition of ‘rhetorical country’, like Hammond, Benjamin, and Nora, Augé sees significance in non-places because of the narratives – the *stories* – that give them meaning:

... Where is the character at home? The question bears less on a geographical territory than a rhetorical territory (rhetorical in the classical sense, as defined by the rhetorical acts: plea, accusation, eulogy, censure, recommendation, warning, and so on). The character is at home when he is at ease in the rhetoric of the people with whom he shares life. The sign of being at home is the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty, and to follow the reasoning of others without any need for long explanations... (p.179). (Augé 1995: 108)

Augé’s project is useful in establishing that anthropology must consider spaces of mediation *between* what we have traditionally thought of as places, as legitimate new objects of research. His use of the term ‘non-place’ distracts, however, from my interest here in different practices of ‘emplacement’. I continue, therefore, using the terms space and place for the sake of clarity.

Levinson – cyberspace as place

Media Studies theorist Paul Levinson pushes Augé’s call to arms a step further, describing what kind of place cyberspace has become, focusing less on the communities formed in online forums than on the ‘architecture’ of the Internet’s pages themselves. Levinson echoes much recent literature on cyberspace in noting the fundamentally interactive nature of the Internet. Users interact with one another, by exchanging opinions in chat rooms, and with the medium itself, ‘creat[ing] content online with almost every use.’ Many have hailed this as the ‘democratizing consequence’ (Levinson 1999: 38) of the Internet (see also Jordan 1999; Mele 2003; Tsagarousianou et. al. 1998):

[U]nlike our experience with books, newspapers, and magazines, which for all but a tiny fraction of the population has been a one-way engagement of reading not writing, the online experience is two-way, allowing readers to contribute via email, bulletin-board discussion, and all manner of annotation as they navigate the Web... The result is an enormous increase and dispersion of image producers, who can render far more images on a public screen with personal computers than can their far fewer counterparts in far more expensive TV and film studios... (Levinson 1999: 38)

Levinson’s most provocative and relevant point for our discussion is that the Internet user’s act of individualized interpretation and participation online resembles the interactive nature of “pre-literate,” “village” life: ‘the space that the computer screen invites us to join is indeed everywhere, but unlike the space on the television screen, it is potentially of our own making – we create it and remake it by using it – just like the acoustic space of the pre-literate environment’ (Levinson 1999: 6). He continues that:

The online villager, who can live anywhere in the world with a personal computer, a telephone line, and a Web browser, can engage in dialogue, seek out rather than merely receive news stories, and in general exchange information cross the globe much like the inhabitants of any village or stadium. (Levinson 1999: 7).

Not dissimilar to Nora’s reference to ‘pre-modern’ memory-creation, Levinson’s comparison of ‘pre-literate’ village life and life in cyberspace is critical to my concern here with the possibility of a Palestinian ‘homeland’ online. In Sections Three and Four I explore how the initial ‘emplacement’ of the land of Palestine into a homeland can inform our understanding of the

‘emplacement’ of a Palestinian website – village? – online. First, I provide an overview of how the development of the idea of Palestine – as a homeland for the Palestinians – has been understood.

2.3 How Palestine Became a Homeland

In 1997 historian Rashid Khalidi published a comprehensive history of Palestinian identity. *Palestinian Identity* had to be written, he argues, because:

One of the most common tropes in treatments of issues related to Palestine is the idea that Palestinian identity, and with it Palestinian nationalism, are ephemeral and of recent origin... Such a distorted vision of the Palestinian national narrative denies the complex genesis of this identity over many decades around the turn of the twentieth century. (Khalidi 1997: 177; see also Elmessiri 1981: 77; Gubser 1978: 123)

2.3.1 ‘Trauma’ of flight and exile

Helena Lindholm Schulz’s *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* is one of the many studies that suffer from the assumption that Palestinian identity – and with it, Palestinian refugees’ attachment to the land of Palestine – only developed with the ‘trauma of being deprived of [their] land’ (Schulz 2003: 93). Schulz acknowledges that ‘a Palestinian identity was emerging in the 1910s,’ but insists that this was only as ‘resistance against Zionism and against emerging land alienation’ (Schulz 2003: 97) – again, as a result of a ‘trauma of being deprived of land.’

2.3.2 ‘External’ explanations

Schulz’s argument relies on an assumption prevalent in much of the relevant literature, attributing the development of Palestinian identity to ‘external’ factors, without allowing for the possibility of ‘emplacement’ by Palestinians themselves. According to this assumption, it was the threat of Zionism and the ambitions of the European powers in Palestine that created Palestinians’ attachment to the land, compounded by ‘Ottoman administrative boundaries’ defining a specific geographic area as Palestine (Khalidi 1997: 151). But, Khalidi asserts,

The existing sense of Palestine as a country... was little affected by Ottoman administrative changes, in part because it was based on the long-standing and firmly held religious idea common to all three monotheistic faiths that Palestine within generally recognized borders was a holy land. (Khalidi 1997: 29)

Nor were Zionism and other European threats the central impetus for attachment to the land:

...for the Palestinians there were always other ‘others’ besides Zionism: among them were the covetous European powers and the country’s Turkish rulers before World War I, and the British Mandatory authorities and other Arab peoples after that... the Arab population of Palestine had a strong attachment to their country – albeit an attachment expressed in pre-nationalist terms – long before the arrival of modern political Zionism on the scene in the last years of the nineteenth century. (Khalidi 1997: 154)

2.3.3 ‘Internal’ processes

Khalidi – of the press and ‘imagined community’

Based on an examination of the Palestinian and other Arab press from the turn of the twentieth century on, Khalidi draws on Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. ‘Anderson’s stress on the crucial role of what he calls ‘print capitalism’ in the genesis and growth of nationalism,’ he writes, ‘seems particularly apt in the Palestinian case’ (Khalidi 1997: 253):

Among the many influences on cultural and intellectual life during the last few decades of Ottoman rule, the press had perhaps the most widespread impact on society. As part of the cultural, educational, and linguistic revival known as the *nahda*... the daily press, as well as periodicals, flourished. (Khalidi 1997: 53)

Khalidi holds that the texts produced during this revival ‘provide us with an invaluable window on the self view of an important segment of society, and the development of ideas about politics, society, and identity’ (Khalidi 1997: 53). He recognizes that his reliance on written texts during a period of significant illiteracy means that ‘we cannot be sure who was reading it at the time’ (Khalidi 1997: 53), suggesting that ‘[w]hat will ultimately be required is research into the reading habits in the Arab world in this and other periods’ (Khalidi 1997: 228). While such a history is outside the scope of *Palestinian Identity*, Khalidi maintains throughout the book that ‘people were accustomed to having the newspapers read aloud to them at home and in public places, so that the low level of literacy, while a barrier to the influence of the press, was not an insurmountable one’ (Khalidi 1997: 57; see also 55, 173).

My aim in this Section is to try and understand how Palestinians’ ‘deep attachment to place’ (Khalidi 1997: 53) with ‘the idea of Palestine as a source of identity and as a community’ (Khalidi 1997: 156) ‘rapidly became widespread beyond the cities and the literate population in the following years’ (Khalidi 1997: 173). Through what sorts of practices did the majority of the Arab population of Palestine – which was largely rural and illiterate (Khalidi 1997; Baldensperger 1913; Granqvist 1947) – come to ‘emplace’ the land of Palestine not only with local attachments, but with the meaning of Palestine as a homeland, before flight?

Ayalon – storytelling and group/collective reading

As luck would have it, in 2004 historian Ami Ayalon produced a work filling precisely the gap Khalidi identifies – a history of reading in Palestine between 1900 and 1948. Section Five of *Reading Palestine* illustrates how ‘attachment to place, a love of country, and local patriotism [became] crucial elements in the construction of nation-state nationalism’ (Khalidi 1997: 21), despite the fact that ‘[l]arge sections of [Palestinian] society... were left out of the process of [the expansion of literacy]: members of the older generation who were already beyond school age, much of the rural society, nomads, and women’ (Ayalon 2004: 3; see also Ashrawi 1978: 84; Baldensperger 1913; Granqvist 1947).

Ayalon presents a genealogy of group news-reading in Palestine, tracing it back to ‘vocalized praying in the house of praying,’ ‘the archetypal occasion of oral communication’ in both the Muslim and the Christian experiences. When the Holy Book was recited, ‘one did not have to be literate or to make out the sense of each word uttered in order to share it; memorization and then recitation sufficed for evoking this auditory reality’ (Ayalon 2004: 133). He continues that ‘non-religious messages such as news and official announcements also circulated through oral channels,’ so that most people in a given village became informed by ‘listening to the town or village crier’ (Ayalon 2004: 135).

In the early 1900s, when the Arab and Palestinian press became widespread, the rural population ‘fell back on old practices... a single competent reader verbally conveyed written messages to a listening crowd and a single literate family member updated the rest’ (Ayalon 2004: 4). Oral communication, Ayalon tells us, was also used as a pastime:

Nothing embodied oral culture more typically than public sessions of listening to stories. They involved the teller – *hakawati*, *rawi*, or *qass*, normally a person with an excellent memory for retaining the many details of the stories, high verbal and expressive ability, and

preferably also a theatrical gift and an audience hungry for entertainment. (Ayalon 2004: 137)

When the press came to Palestine, then, much of the population became exposed to it through storytelling-cum-group reading.

Drawing on Benjamin's theory that storytelling, because of its interactive and descriptive nature, creates individual and collective memory, I propose that this collective reading experience served to 'emplace' the land of Palestine as a Palestinian homeland for its Arab inhabitants. For:

[w]hile the backbone of the event was the passing on of the story from the teller to his listeners, in effect the whole experience was interactive. The audience would normally encourage the teller, directing him to tell favourite tales or focus on favourite episodes; sometimes the listeners would vividly identify with the heroes and respond emotionally to the unfolding plot. (Ayalon 2004: 137)

In effect, then, the audience of group readings and storytellings performed, just as the tellers did (see also Sayigh 1998, 44).

Bearing in mind Nora's premise that 'memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces [and] gestures,' it is also vital that both traditional storytelling and group reading were markedly performative events and occurred in shared *public places*. Stories and news were told with the teller 'at the centre, presenting the text with the right narrative and the right intonation to the best of his talent, sometimes physically acting out the story.' Storytelling and group reading sessions took place in 'town cafes, street corners, and village gathering places,' on an 'elevated or otherwise visible spot,' 'under the *sidrah* tree' or on an 'elevated bench' (Ayalon 2004: 136-8). 'Villagers would meet daily in the usual places, where the learned among them would perform the same duties they had in the past, now by reading newspapers, handbills, or any text that had reached the place,' and 'a single copy would suffice to enlighten a whole community (Ayalon 2004: 142).

Not only did group reading inform Palestinian villagers about the news of the day. It was also, I argue, essential in doing the 'work' of inscribing the meaning of Palestinian-ness onto the public spaces in which it was done, especially – although not only – because of the content of what was being read aloud in those spaces. It is not difficult to understand how this 'emplacement' occurred if we take even just one day's headlines as an example. The newspaper *Suriyya al-Janubiyya* was, in the 1910 and 1920s, the most influential organ of opinion and the most popular newspaper of the day. The following is a passage that appeared on the paper's front page in a January 1920 issue – and was, according to Ayalon's findings, performed aloud, with the participation of its audience, in town cafes, public squares and olive groves throughout Palestine:

Palestine, oh stage of the Prophets and source of great men; Palestine, oh sister of the gardens of paradise; Palestine, oh Ka'ba of hopes and source of fulfilment; Palestine, oh beloved of millions of people; Palestine, oh lord of lands and pride of worshippers; Palestine, oh source of happiness and spring of purity; Palestine, my country and the country of my forefathers and ancestors... Palestine, oh maiden of nations and desired of peoples; Palestine, my honour, my glory, my life and my pride. (Khalidi 1997: 169)

Can we not instantly imagine the impact such events must have had, on a daily basis over four decades, on the inhabitants' conception of the land on which they lived? Were such events not, following Hammond, Turton, Benjamin, Nora and Appadurai, the 'work' of creating a homeland?

Taking as my starting point that storytelling and group reading were indeed practices of ‘emplacement’ in the spaces of Palestine, I devote Sections Three and Four to how these practices can inform our understanding of the way spaces on the Internet – over sixty years later – may also be in the process of being ‘emplaced’ by Palestinians in exile, now removed from their original homeland.

SECTION 3: BETWEEN STORYTELLING AND A PALESTINIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT: MEMORY AND HISTORY THROUGH THE GENERATIONS

'Facts do not all speak for themselves, but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain and circulate them. Such a narrative has to have a beginning and an end: in the Palestinian case, a homeland for the resolution of its exile since 1948. But... 'narrative in general, from the folk tale to the novel, from annals to the fully realized 'history,' has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority'' (Said 1984: 34).

3.1 Generation of Palestine and Generation of the Disaster (*jil al-nakba*)

After 1948, Palestinians continued to tell stories – whether in Israel or Lebanon, Transjordan, Syria, or Egypt. The generation of refugees born and raised in Palestine were the 'Generation of Palestine.' The generation born in Palestine but raised in exile is the 'Generation of the Disaster/Catastrophe' (*jil al-nakba*). In the first two decades of exile these generations told stories of life before the Catastrophe. According to Benjamin's definition of storytelling, this storytelling had similar characteristics to that before 1948. Most importantly it described particular people and places. Research in Jordan has found that:

[t]hree main elements characterize the narratives of the first generation of Palestinian refugees. First, the detailed description of the village of origin. In many cases narrators shift to the present tense, as if the village still exists, bringing it back to life with its landscape, changing seasons, colours, smells, the produce of each village, the 'peasant way of life' and their celebrations and commemorations... The second element that appears in narratives is the war of 1948... [and] the third part in the narratives pertains to the journey of exile itself... (Farah 2005: 97)

In a typical example of this storytelling, one Palestinian woman from the first generation recounts: '...back home, we ate our own prickly pear, our figs, our harvest, your food and your drink was from your own land, your livestock...' (Farah 2005: 97).

3.2 Generation of the Revolution (*jil al-thawra*)

As the years passed, the generation born in exile expressed increasing impatience with its condition and, with it, with the stories of the older generations that seemed unable to provide a framework through which to understand its desperate situation (Sayigh 1988; Khalidi 1997: 27). In 1988, Sayigh observed that the *jil al-nakba*'s:

... belief in themselves, their ignorance of Zionist power... their naive dependence on Arab promises of help... prevented them from fully understanding what was happening in the Forties, as Zionist preparations to take over the state mounted. Looking back at their peasant parents, today's Palestinians see them as good-hearted and patriotic, but politically unconscious. For the generations born outside Palestine... political consciousness is the supreme good, the key to successful struggle. Sacrifice, steadfastness, faith – all the traditional peasant virtues – are still needed as the moral basis of struggle. But the lesson of the Disaster was that these qualities were not enough; they had to be guided by a correct ideology, which could only be the product of consciousness. (Sayigh 1988: 13).

That it took until after 1967 for a Palestinian national movement to gain momentum has been explained by looking at various historico-political factors. McDowall suggests that during the first two decades refugees thought they would soon return, and that most had to focus on immediate survival needs (McDowall 1995: 68). Zureik and Gubser argue that between 1949 and 1967 the Palestinian issue was subsumed by pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism, while Lesch

provides that the fact that the traditional elite leadership was co-opted by the Jordanian throne created a power vacuum that took time to fill (Lesch 1985: 119). Most agree that this movement did not emerge suddenly, but that after the mid-1960s it gained international recognition (Khalidi 1997: 180; Gubser 1978: 123).

What interests me here is that the emergence of the Palestinian national movement resulted in a narrative very different from the stories of the generations before the ‘Generation of the Revolution’ (*jil al-thawra*), relying on a different kind of telling altogether: history-telling.

The movement, which was most lively in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan, promoted a monolithic, Palestinian national narrative in place of the particularistic, simply ‘descriptive’ stories of the past. Following Benjamin’s model, I suggest that this history-telling caused a ‘decline’ in the primacy of storytelling (Benjamin 1936: 83). It was propagated by the politically active, through panel discussions, literary events, theatrical performances, organizational meetings, etc. (Ashrawi 1978: 80; Said 1980: 155; Pappé 2004: 158).

It used a standard set of national symbols, such as the key, folklore and the ‘resistance fighter’, all representing the determination of the Palestinian people, and was woven into a single narrative, with few explicitly varied perspectives. A single village’s story, in other words, was read as The Palestinian Story (Ashrawi 1978: 81). In poetry and literature, the overarching nature of the narrative produced ‘a rigid pattern depriving the literature of much of its originality and vitality’ (Ashrawi 1978: 82).

This national narrative was presented as History, so that each personal, localized story that had been crucial to the formation of Palestinian identity and to the ‘emplacement’ of Palestine as a homeland before 1948, now ‘function[ed] on some inevitably primitive level as valuable testimonial, as raw information for a setting...’ (Said 1984: 38). Differences among personal and local stories were simply variations on a single theme, a phenomenon Bourdieu has described as a symptom of ‘habitus,’ according to which: ‘Personal’ style, the particular stamp marking all the products of the same habitus, whether practices or works, is never more than a deviation in relation to the style of a period or class so that it relates back to the common style...’ (Bourdieu 1977: 86).

Nora suggests that History and nationalism occur in tandem, both ‘level[ing] particularity’ and ‘recogniz[ing] individuals only as identical and equal’ (Nora 1989: 12). The task of the Palestinian national narrative, like those of French historians in Nora’s account, ‘consisted in establishing a more positive, all-encompassing, and explicative memory’ (Nora 1989: 9). Sayigh elaborates by noting that ‘the idea of Palestinian history as ‘plots’ (i.e. international and regional politics) was part of the mindset of the Resistance movement. For nationalists of this period, national history stood over and excluded the local, the gendered, and the personal’ (Sayigh 1998: 42).

Newly preoccupied with explaining the *nakba* and changing the course of their fate, the *jil al-thawra* circulated this narrative throughout the scattered camps of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. An explanation for how the Palestinians had been dispersed and a recipe for how they would return to Palestine – or gain national sovereignty – it involved not a process of storytelling but of history-telling. For a variety of reasons, it did not ‘live’ in the spaces in which it was told – it did not ‘emplace’ them, as storytelling had ‘emplaced’ Palestine. For, the process of transmitting the narrative was not in itself of great importance, as it is in storytelling. Nor was its audience encouraged to provide its own interpretation. Rather, this History of the Palestinians was meant to be known *as is*, to be reproduced when necessary, and acted upon whenever possible. This

must be understood as history in Nora's terms, which 'takes root in events' rather than concrete 'objects' and 'spaces.' This is not to say, as does Schulz, that '[f]or refugees, current places of residence are not capable of rendering meaning' (Schulz 2004: 184), rather, that this generation turned to history-telling is perhaps indicative of a common sense of being 'out of place.' Instead of emplacing their new spaces, this narrative floated above the land and across borders, binding dispersed Palestinians in a common quest of resistance to the new Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank.

To the extent that this was a narrative expected to be always-already known, it was carried in Palestinian individuals, who became, in a sense, *lieux de memoire* themselves. Nora maintains that with the emergence of History (to the detriment of memory), history becomes the responsibility of the individual: 'with memory ineluctably engulfed by history, the historian has become no longer a memory-individual but, in himself, a *lieu de memoire*' (Nora 1989: 18). Where each Palestinian may have been a storyteller, he was transformed into a historian, who differs from the storyteller, Benjamin posits, in that he 'is bound to explain in one way or another the happenings with which he deals' (Benjamin 1936: 96), whereas the storyteller only 'describes.' This is not uncommon in national narratives, as Bourdieu has also shown (Bourdieu 1977: 96).

This was especially true of those perceived as the major 'mouthpieces' of the movement. Writers and poets like Kanafani and Darwish, whose works were 'the poetry of commitment,' were 'the spokesmen of a nation. In committing themselves thus, they became national symbols of resistance... burdened with the aspirations of a whole nation, that they are no longer free agents or individuals' (Ashrawi 1978: 83).

As nationalist narratives tend to be, this one was also expressed in Palestinian archaeological efforts, in libraries and other spaces Nora dubs *lieux de memoire*. These spaces were imbued with such potency that they were perceived as threatening to Israeli authorities. Said observed:

how seriously Israel took the emergence not only of a national movement but of a national history, that... Israeli soldiers carted off Palestinian archives, destroyed the private libraries and homes of prominent Lebanese nationalists and Palestinian personalities... (Said 1983: 5).

That 'this was all a concerted, deliberate attempt to roll back the history of the past several years,' that 'Palestinians, in Begin's rhetoric, were to be treated... neither as human beings nor as potential citizens,' (Said 1983:5) supports the idea that Palestinians' insistence on a historical narrative represented an insistence on their very humanity.

The strength, at the time, of this narrative has been attributed to several things. Said proposes that 'Palestine's unusual centrality... privileges a Western master narrative' (Said 1984: 34), prompting Palestinians to produce counter-narratives. Ashrawi writes that it was 'a defence mechanism reaction among the Palestinians, who insist on preserving their identity at all costs' (Ashrawi 1978: 82). In Khalidi's view, 'this narrative was one which enabled the Palestinians to make sense of a troubled history which involved enormous efforts against great odds simply for them to maintain their identity as a people' (Khalidi 1997: 199).

It is also attributable, however, to the fact (as has been mentioned) that in many Palestinian refugee communities the storytelling that continued did so in the home, especially by women, whose voices were rarely heard (Christison 1996: 109).

It is also possible that women told stories but with less and less 'interactiveness,' 'descriptiveness', and particularity. Sayigh notes that '[m]ost older Palestinian camp women's

stories have a dramatic, audience-attracting and aesthetic quality that is not found – or not to the same extent – in the life stories of younger, educated women’ (Sayigh 1998: 50). Women of the younger generation who told stories, then, tended to highlight the aspects of their experiences relating to the Palestinian political situation. Finally, the resistance movement coincided with a period in Western historiography that favoured political parties, elites and ‘events’ over the individual, often unwritten stories of such non-elites as women, peasants, etc. (Sayigh 1998).

The movement begun by the *jil al-thawra* in the 1960s culminated in the late 1980s with the outbreak of the first *Intifada*. It became, writes Salim Tamari, a ‘radical populist’ movement without particular social, religious or class orientation (Tamari 1991: 65; Pappe 2004: 148). While successful in causing a truly popular uprising against the Israeli occupation, it began to shift in the 1990s. This transformation appears to have marked a return to the ideology of ‘steadfastness’ (*samud*) that had characterized Palestinian national sentiment before the height of radical populism. For Palestinian refugees, ‘the answers seemed no longer to be found within the Palestinian political organizations’ so that in their stead, ‘Al-Awda [‘return’] networks... have become a new channel for political mobilization...’ (Schulz 2004:180):

The most substantial result of the peace process between 1994 and 1999,’ writes Schulz, ‘was the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority. Diaspora state- and nation-building was territorialized... This transformation of official nationalism resulted in a radical change of representations among refugees. (Schulz 2004: 157)

3.3 The Fourth and Fifth Generations: Return to Storytelling

This shift has summoned a revival of ‘descriptive’, particularistic and interactive storytelling. Meanwhile, practices associated with what Nora defines as history – archiving, cultural ‘preservation’ projects, etc – also play an important role. Glock writes:

increasingly there is public awareness among the Arabs in Israel and the occupied territories that symbols of the past must somehow be preserved, if only to keep the memory of a rich past alive for the next generation. Private museums have been organized in some towns. Collections of regional costumes have been published... . (Glock 1994: 79)

These practices include pieces featured in the Beirut-based *Journal of Palestine Studies*, such as ‘Oral History: The Story of a Palestinian Under Occupation’ (Baransi 1980; see also JPS 1988: 158).

Some ‘preservation’ efforts, like the Deir Yassin Remembered Project, have been related to the loss of material sites such as villages. Others, like the Arab Resource Center for Popular Arts (ARCPA) oral history project have expressed an interest in rescuing the first generations’ stories from extinction as that generation disappears (ARCPA 2005).

What differentiates this period from the Generation of the Revolution is that storytelling has resurfaced. Indeed, the proliferation of storytelling projects in the fourth and fifth generations in exile seems to indicate a return to the storytelling of the *jil al-nakba* and the generations before the Catastrophe. Unlike the generations’ storytelling before it, though, this storytelling circulates not within local towns and villages, but across borders through pen-pal projects, week-long workshops and, most importantly, on the Internet.

Factors influencing this revival include that ‘knowledge of the village of origin and of Palestinian history is scanty, unlike older generations’ (Farah 2005: 99). Sayigh writes that:

[t]he village, city and camp histories that have been produced in recent years can be seen as attempts to recuperate textually places that no longer exist or are threatened with demolition, incorporation, or forgetting. (Sayigh 1998: 57)

Recent research in Jordan shows that:

the form and content of what is being shown [on television] differs from the oral narratives passed down by parents and grandparents. The official and public news do not bring back the original village to life, neither do they speak to each individual refugee and his or her particular roots back in Palestine. (Farah 2005: 100)

Another question posed by scholars like Sayigh involves the extent to which, on the one hand, Palestinians' renewed attention to storytelling might be influenced by historiographical trends that have recently become more interested in 'life histories,' giving a 'face' to political issues, underrepresented groups whose stories are 'unofficial' and unwritten, etc. On the other hand, they ask whether NGO projects – which are affected by, and affect this historiographical shift – might also be behind storytellings' renaissance, for instance in the way they have affected perceptions of childhood (Farah 2005: 112).

Sayigh insists that storytelling has been neglected in the historical record, in particular because it became the realm of women. Before the resistance movement grew, Palestinian men in exile – now landless peasants in refugee camps – often worked in unskilled urban jobs outside the camps. When men (and some younger women) became involved in political activities, older women stayed at home. When Sayigh conducted research in Lebanese camps, she noted 'the absence of national politics from older speakers' first accounts' (Sayigh 1998: 47), commenting that their stories were 'seldom framed in a broader chronological narrative, and because of this they were not recognized as history, either by themselves or by others' (Sayigh 1998: 42, 43).

The related argument focusing on the influences of NGO programmes has been articulated by Schulz and in Chatty and Hundt's recent volume *Children of Palestine*. Chatty writes:

[i]n Lebanon, Save the Children Fund (SCF) experimented with creative partnerships with children... [seeking] to work with youths, to understand and communicate young people's perspectives through their self-generated representations of home and community. (Chatty 2005: 7).

The characteristics of storytelling from Benjamin's theory are present in all these projects. They foster interactive exchanges of experiences. They embrace the differences as much as the similarities among Palestinians of the fourth and fifth generations; in so doing, they claim to be more concerned with 'describing' – than with explaining – Palestinian experiences today. They focus especially on Palestinian refugees of the fourth and fifth generations, representing roughly fifty percent of the total Palestinian population today, a noteworthy proportion (McDowall 1995: 125). Recent projects include: 'Children of Shatila', which tells the stories of youth in Lebanon's Shatila refugee camp; a 'Hakawati' project held over a number of days in Jenin and designed to 'create artworks inspired by storytelling sessions' among Palestinian children, expatriate Palestinian artists and 'elders'; and the now-famous pen-pal storytelling project that took place between youth in Shatila and Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem (Masri 2001).

If storytelling is again central after a two-generation hiatus, and if storytelling was important in 'emplacing' Palestine as a homeland before 1948, whether it is having a similar effect today requires that we consider where the projects take place. 'Children of Shatila' was organized in Shatila and publicized online. The Hakawati Camp lasted only days and demanded that participants travel to the site from their scattered locations for that short period. The pen-pal

version of storytelling took place in the past as, aside from a single meeting across an Israeli fence, the children exchanging stories did not occupy the same physical space. It is therefore difficult to suggest that these storytellings have led to the ‘emplacement’ of any particular space. There is, however, one identifiable space storytelling *has* emplaced, and it is to this space – cyberspace – that I devote the rest of the paper.

3.4 Storytelling Online

The last decade has seen a remarkable rise in Palestinian-related websites (see Appendix I). Based on research on Islam online, Jon Anderson determines that: ‘on-line communication... break[s] into roughly two kinds... One is found on Usenet newsgroups or electronic bulletin boards and e-mail lists’ (Anderson, J. 1999: 46). The other is comprised of websites created by, for or about interest groups. In terms of Palestinian ‘interest groups,’ ‘[o]n the Internet one can find everything from official Palestinian National Authority sites, to various organizations in the West Bank and Gaza and in the diaspora...’ (Schulz 2004: 181). Among these websites we find sub-categories. These can be divided into websites – such as Electronicintifada.com – that provide information about Palestinians today; those that provide ‘the official’ account of Palestinian history, such as Palestinehistory.com; countless websites that serve as the virtual storefronts of Palestinian-related NGOs; and personal pages of Palestinians living around the world.

The overwhelming majority of sites, crucially, are increasingly devoted to fostering communication – through online forums and message boards – while simultaneously providing a window into the Palestinian past and/or present. ‘One project, the Across Borders Project (ABP), was initiated in 1999 by the Information Technology Unit at Birzeit University. Its intention was to create a ‘virtual space’ for refugees to communicate without the restrictions of borders and checkpoints’ (Schulz 2004:181). While facilitating refugees’ sharing of experiences in different camps and countries, each of the six ABP camp websites also features daily camp news and, in some cases, a brief history.

Few scholars of Palestinian refugees have, to date, looked into the nature, roots and impact these websites have on either Palestinian or non-Palestinian Internet-users. Many have noted that, though not yet widely accessible (Appadurai 1997), computers and the Internet are in high demand and rapidly becoming more accessible among Palestinians in the Middle East. In 2004, research among Palestinian youth in five field sites revealed that not only is there a great demand for computers, but that the lack of computers in schools has even been a reason for children dropping out (Serhan and Tabari 2005: 53). Internet cafes are increasingly central to life in the Middle East, and several initiatives – such as ‘Enlighten,’ which established a computer and Internet centre in Gaza’s Bireij camp in 2000 – have been launched to build and stock new ones in recent years.

Most Palestinians living in wealthier countries such as the U.S., Canada, Israel and the Gulf states have greater access to computers and to the Web. Those scholars who have addressed the Palestinians and information technology have, as Schulz does, pointed to how it has facilitated communication among scattered family members and friends (Schulz 2004: 181), however, they fail to incorporate debates about the Internet itself or what happens on it within – or outside of – simple ‘communication.’

Volumes have been dedicated to how Islam is portrayed, interpreted, and propagated on the Internet. These have been far more probing, yielding interesting conclusions. Anderson writes that the ‘Internet is one of these new media, by some measures a new public space, which

enables a new class of interpreters... to address and thereby to reframe Islam's authority and expression for those like themselves and others who come there' (Anderson 1999: 41). Hadden and Cowan warn, however, that 'who owns that data that populates the ever increasing number of Web sites and who controls access to it, are questions of enormous importance' (Hadden and Cowan 2000: 5).

In a slight reversal of their warning, I use the next Section to explore how Palestinians have used techniques of demarcation, inclusion and exclusion, to carve out *Palestinian places* in cyberspace. Looking specifically at online storytelling, hyperlinking, and how Palestinian history is written online my project is to determine the extent to which the Internet is a space with corners 'emplaced' as a virtual Palestine. I use Palestineremembered.com as a case study, arguing that, while a 'virtual Palestine' exists, it serves less as a virtual replacement for the original homeland than as a forum for Palestinians to reinterpret visions of a *future* homeland.

SECTION 4: PALESTINEREMEMBERED.COM: AN EMERGING VIRTUAL HOMELAND? ARCHIVAL STORYTELLING ONLINE



The village of Hittin. (1934) (URUS)

Figure 1

4.1 Case Study: Palestineremembered.com

4.1.1 Choosing this site

I have chosen Palestineremembered.com for several reasons. The most important is that it combines several of the elements that characterize most Palestinian-related websites: it includes message boards; it provides historical information about the Palestinians; and it combines both storytelling and archiving. Dating from 1999, it is one of the older and best-established Palestinian-related sites, and is one of the most visited, as indicated in the hundreds of users' messages filling its pages. Links to it from other websites abound. Because its primary language is English, its visitors include Palestinians *and* non-Palestinians. Many Palestinian-related websites use English, probably because they seek not only to facilitate communication among Palestinians but also to present 'counter-images' of Palestinians to the West (Schulz 2004: 179). Because of its English bias, having limited knowledge of Arabic, I was also better able read it.

Naturally, that about eighty percent of the site is in English (and the rest in Arabic) means that users without knowledge of written English may feel less 'welcome'. This is compounded by the fact that Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, like many underprivileged groups, are likely to have less access to computers and the Web than are those in Europe and North America, for instance (Appadurai 1997: 195; CIA World Factbook 2005).

With this in mind, and accepting that without further research we cannot determine the intentions of the site's creators or its impact on visitors, I attempt in this Section to assess whether the site represents a virtual Palestinian homeland. I argue that, while Palestinian websites like Palestineremembered.com are inscribed by Palestinians with meaning *as Palestinian places in*

cyberspace, they cannot comprise a virtual homeland that stands in for the homeland of Palestine as it was. I conclude by asking what version of Palestine is represented in cyberspace nevertheless.

4.2 Between History and Storytelling Online: ‘Emplacing’ Cyberspace

4.2.1 *Storytelling online*

I use Benjamin’s dichotomy between ‘description’ and ‘explanation’ to argue that the site manifests elements of storytelling as he defines it, while the following sub-sections show one of the many ways this dichotomy is proven false. Similarly, the site demands that we rethink the memory-history binary put forth by Nora.

On one hand, the revival of storytelling among Palestinians online bears many similarities to storytelling as it took – and gave meaning to – place in pre-1948 Palestine. Online storytelling again gives primacy to the particular, it is interactive, and much of its content is ‘descriptive’.

Palestineremembered.com is particularistic in that it contains sections dedicated to specific villages and towns depopulated in 1948-49. It offers ‘Statistics and Facts,’ with photographs depicting their particular olive groves and events, mosques and markets (see Figure 1). ‘Stories and Memories’ sections in each village page contain the particular words of Palestinian users remembering buildings, habits and events from before the *nakba* and what happened afterwards (see Appendix II). The particularity of each of these stories is echoed in the ‘Message Board’ of each village page, where users provide their commentary on experiences of the site itself and their hopes for the future of Palestine, each comment expressing an individual voice. The detailed nature of each submission – specific dates, numbers of kilometres, trees, photographs of land deeds – also emphasizes a tone of ‘description’, rather than explanation.

Secondly and most importantly, the site is interactive. It is an open forum for discussion, always changing, and is thus always a source of new experiences. In its Message Boards and Guestbook users express their being moved upon visiting the site:

God knows and is my witness that tears came to my eyes when I first saw the pictures of my beloved homeland. It is even more beautiful than I had ever imagined it to be. (Abdel Fattah Al-Sayyed, 7/8/03 Bayt Dajan)

This website has awakened my heart and has allowed me to walk through the footsteps of my hittin-born and raised grandparents. Despite it containing only a few pictures of hittin, these few pictures are the only depictions I’ve had of the land I belong to... . (Nada Rabah, 6/2/03, Hittin).

Some use the site to find lost relatives, and others are found by accident. The message ‘Please if anyone have more information about Beit Thul and its land, and the history of its citizen send it to me on my e-mail or call me...’ (Jamal Ali, 30/3/02, Thul), was responded to as follows: ‘It turns out that Jamal, we do know you and your father. So inshallah we will get in touch soon’ (Neda Khalil, 15/11/02, Thul). Others engage in political exchanges, mainly expressing support for the Palestinian cause:

The only way to resolve the suffering of our peoples is a Bi-National state. One man, one vote... We will recover political power in our beloved Palestina through the ballot box. We will win any democratic elections. Long live democracy!... One man, one vote! This must be our slogan. (Abdul Bashar, 12/4/05, Acre)

Both sides of my Catholic family left Ireland because of the English. We know and understand murder, and government theft of lands... The silence of the world's politicians is amazing... Understand, I am a Marine who is in his 70s who loves the USA... I am also unhappy with the American political position throughout these years regarding your homeland .(Danny Moran, 13/5/04, Guestbook)

Others are critical:

As'salam w'alaikum... I just want to know what is going on these days?! Have people forgot about our leader? Yes... I am referring to Yasser Arafat, Abu Amar... no, he wasn't the best leader, nor was he a very good leader, but he was OUR leader. It is because of him, the worlds eyes opened slightly to the Palestinian struggle. He put Palestine on the maps. I can't help but feel that many people have forgotten him in these so called renewed peace talks. I am ashamed to be honest with you... Open your eyes!... .(AyounFilasteen, 12/2/05, Guestbook)

You people are pathetic. Why don't you get on with your lives like the 1 million Jews expelled from Arab countries have done. (david, 22/2/05, Guestbook)

While we cannot, without extensive field research, determine how and how many, it is clear that many people who visit the site also have experiences with relatives and friends where they live, prompted by their visits online (see Appendix III). Some describe the process of visiting itself: 'I am now in United Arab Emirates with my mother beside me, she is very happy to see some unique information about our beloved home village in Bayt Thull' (Jamal Ali, 30/3/02, Bayt Thul).

That Palestineremembered.com is a website navigable by hyperlinks means that it is by definition interactive. In "Hypertext/Postcolonial Aesthetic," Jaishree Odin argues:

Hypertext aesthetic is rooted in active and interactive reading like oral storytelling. Multilinear narratives of hypertext can be regarded as a return to oral storytelling... Benjamin's lamentation about the death of storytelling in the age of information finds its apotheosis in the birth of hypertext, since hypertext marks the beginning of storytelling once again. (Odin 2005).

Clicking on the countless links on each page, the user creates an individualized path along which he or she travels through the site. In sections of the site devoted to Palestinian history as it has been written by contemporary scholars, many town names and key topics ('refugees' and 'Balfour Declaration') are hyperlinked. Embedded within historical narratives, these links, if clicked on, generate the experience of an interruption in the narrative, much like what would occur in a live storytelling.

The site is interactive in how it addresses the user as well. The Homepage's links invite the user to 'Quiz Yourself on Israeli Democracy,' for example. More explicit, though, are the ways users themselves contribute to the site, in the form of donations for the Oral History Project (see Appendix IV), poems about Palestine, messages, stories and photographs (see Appendices V, VI, VII).

The above, then, all characterize Palestineremembered.com as a modern space for storytelling (as defined by Benjamin) as it would have occurred in a pre-1948 Palestinian village. It is because of such elements that Levinson argues that cyberspace closely resembles pre-literate, village life, to recap:

villagers in a stadium can interact with one another and the players, and indeed the players may be villagers themselves – in contrast to the television audience, which consists for the most part of isolated family units, at irreducible arm's length from what they watch on the screen... The online villager, who can live anywhere in the world with a personal computer, a telephone line, and a Web browser, can engage in dialogue, seek out rather than merely receive news stories, and in general exchange information cross the globe much like the inhabitants of any village or stadium. (Levinson 1999: 7)

As such, these are also elements that, according to Nora, would create collective memory which, he argues, 'takes root in the concrete, in spaces,' thereby 'emplacing' the spaces in which it is created with meaning. Spaces that allow for such emplacing, Nora calls *milieu de memoire*. If storytelling-cum-group reading 'worked' to inscribe the meaning of 'homeland' onto Palestine in the early 1900s, is online storytelling emplacing cyberspace with similar meaning? To answer this I look at what, other than storytelling, is taking place at Palestineremembered.com.

4.2.2 Archiving online

While Palestineremembered.com is 'emplaced' by renewed particularistic, 'descriptive,' interactive storytelling in its virtual pages, it doubles as a live archive, as a place storing Palestinians' memories. Each link connecting the user to a set of photos resembles a museum display memorializing Palestinian exile. For, unlike pre-1948 storytelling, storytellers at Palestineremembered.com do not ask that their audience memorize the details of their stories. Rather, the website serves as a promise that the stories will live on and be accessible, whether or not this particular audience is online to listen/read and whether or not, once they go offline, they can repeat their details to family and friends. The website invites them, in fact, to send family and friends to it as a reference for memory-information. In this sense, the virtual Palestine 'emplaced' through Palestinians' online storytelling and collective memory-building – as a *milieu de memoire*, or environment where experiences become memories – can also be read as what Nora calls a *lieu de memoire*.

In its Mission Statement, the site states that its purpose is, besides storytelling, 'To preserve the memories and the experiences of Palestinian people around the world' and to 'provide a comprehensive source of information about the villages and cities that were ethnically cleansed, looted, and destroyed.' Statistical information about each Palestinian district, town and village is presented in tables of information (see Figure 2 overleaf), echoing Nora's description of the age of history, in which information is compiled and archived, lest it be forgotten or lost.

Like a library, the site offers excerpts and full text documents of scholarly works written about Palestinian history – featuring Palestinian, Israeli, and Western scholars. Its 'Stories and Memories' and 'Pictures' sections, while reminiscent of storytelling, also provide the content of the pages to which many of these scholarly excerpts feature links, as well as the content that the Mission Statement maintains is being 'preserved' (see Figure 3 on page 29).

These archival characteristics lead to questions about who the subjects and what the objects of Palestineremembered.com actually are. Palestineremembered.com appears to be geared towards two types of audience – Palestinians themselves and also non-Palestinians in the early stages of becoming informed, who may or may not be so sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. In being geared towards two groups, the site's spaces are set up and used in very different ways.

Ma'lul
 District Of Nazareth
 Ethnically cleansed 20,786 days ago



معزل

- [Town Statistics & Facts](#)
 - [Town Today](#)
 - [Stories and Memories](#)
 - [Pictures](#)
 - [Related Town Links](#)
 - [Message Board](#)
 - [411 Directory Service](#)
- Choose Another Town In Nazareth:
- Or Choose Another District:



eMail to a friend
 ترجم إلى العربية
 Powered by Ajeeb

Town Statistics & Facts

Statistic/Fact	Value	
Israeli occupation date	July 14th, 1948	
Distance from district center	6 (km) West of Nazareth	
Elevation from the sea	275 (meters)	
Map location	See location number #2 on the map	
Israeli military operation	Second stage of Operation Dekel	
Village remains after destruction by Israelis	Ma'lul was mostly destroyed with the exception of the two village churches and the village mosque.	
Ethnically cleansing by Israelis	Ma'lul inhabitants were completely ethnically cleansed.	
Land ownership before occupation	Ethnic Group	
	Arab	1,949
	Jewish	2,719
	Public	30
	Total	4,698 (4,112 cultivable)
Population before occupation	Year	Population
	1596	77
	19th century	280
	1931	390
	1945	690
Number of houses	In (1931): 90	
Town's name through history	The Crusades referred to the village by <i>Maula</i> .	
Religious institutions	One mosque and two churches, and all remain standing, but in need of serious renovation guys!	
Nearby wadies & rivers	The village overlooks Wadi al-Halabi .	
Water supplies	Two springs lay in the vicinity of Ma'lul, one to the northeast and the other to the northwest.	
Archeological sites	The village contains a magnificent Roman mausoleum, which is known locally as <i>Qasr al-Dayr</i> .	
Israeli settlements on town lands	Migdal ha-Emeq, Kefar ha-Choresh, Timrat, and an Israeli military base.	

[Click here](#) for more information about **Ma'lul** in Arabic and [click here](#) for more information in **Hebrew**.

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Town Today

According to the Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi, the village remaining structures on the village land are: *The village site is now covered with a pine forest planted by the Jewish National Fund and dedicated to the memory of prominent Jews and some non-Jewish Americans and Europeans. A military base is also on the site. The mosque and two churches still stand, and are used intermittently as cow sheds by the residents of Kibbutz Kefar ha-Choresh. Overlooking Wadi al-Halabi, between the village site and the site of al-Mujaydil, is an Israeli plastics factory. Cactus, olive trees, and fig trees grow on the site, which is strewn with piles of stones. A few tombs in the Muslim cemetery across from the mosque can be seen. The main village site*

Figure 2

If online storytelling causes the ‘emplacement’ of a corner of cyberspace as a Palestinian space, these different ways, I argue, mark this space as something more complicated than the site’s self-description – ‘Home of All Ethnically Cleansed Palestinians’ – suggests. Neither wholly *milieu* nor *lieu de memoire*, the site’s structure and content reveal it as a monument to Palestine’s possible future. Below, I elaborate by doing a ‘close reading’ of the site’s Homepage.

4.3 Close Reading: Palestineremembered.com

The Homepage is divided into two sections which, together, present us with seventy-three link options. A single photograph of an aged man dangling a set of old keys to the camera decorates the upper right corner.

One section, which takes up most of the page (see Appendix IV), is comprised of fifty-nine links. The majority of these are informative (what Benjamin calls ‘explanatory’), even didactic, in tone, making apparent that they are geared towards users new to Palestinian issues. They include ‘[The Conflict for Beginners](#),’ ‘[Zionism and Its Impact for Beginners](#)’ and ‘[Tantura Massacre Exposed](#).’ Clicking on the [Guestbook](#) link one finds many messages – around one third of the total number – written by non-Palestinians (see Appendix VII). These users’ countries of origin include China, Lebanon, Canada, Italy, and Argentina. Crucially, among these links each has up to three other links also on the Homepage that lead to the same new page. For instance, there are three links on the Homepage leading to a section on ‘Famous Zionist Quotes.’ This doubling and tripling of links likely gives users the impression of many journey options through the pages of the site, but actually brings them to the same place – only by different paths. This represents a ‘subversion’ of hyperlinking in that ‘hypertext and its links [supposedly] offers the online user a myriad of possible hidden knowledge connections...’ (Levinson 1999: 116). Here, however, the webmaster controls the site’s links, so that every three or four links send non-Palestinian users to the same place.

In stark contrast, the other section of the Homepage, on the left of the page, bears a column of fourteen links, each of which is the name of a district of pre-1948 Palestine. (That this list corresponds exactly with the list of districts as it appears on the contents page of historian Walid Khalidi’s *All That Remains* (2002) is a reflection of the fact that nearly all the information not contributed by Palestinian users in the town and village pages are from his book as well.) There is only one link on the Homepage leading to each of these other pages, and there is no indication on the Homepage of where they might lead. It seems quite clear, therefore, that these links are geared towards people who already know that Tulkarm is a large city in the West Bank, that Safad is an area in the North of what is now Israel that was depopulated in 1948, and so on. While less than a centimetre on the screen away from the other fifty-nine links, this column of fourteen links is, in other words, as though penned off from the rest of the Homepage, under an invisible sign ‘Palestinians this way’ (see Figure 3).

4.3.1 A Space for Palestinians

Each of these fourteen links leads to a site dedicated specifically to that district, whose first page presents the user with a table listing all the towns and villages from which Palestinians fled during the violence of the *nakba*. Clicking on [Safad](#) on the Homepage, for example, we arrive at a table of seventy-seven towns (see Appendix VIII). Clicking on the town of ‘[Ayn al-Zaytun](#),’ presents us with a page announcing that ‘‘Ayn al-Zaytun of the District of Safad’ was ‘Ethnically cleansed 20,827 days ago’ (see Appendix II). Below a pre-1948 photograph of the town is a table of ‘Town Statistics and Facts.’ The tables in Palestineremembered.com give the information within them an ‘aura’ of authority and fact and, most importantly, this standardized way of presenting information serves to weave the individual statistics of each town into a larger narrative of Palestinian history. If every town and village has a table such as that in Figure 2 indicating the ‘Israeli military operation’ that destroyed it, the ‘Ethnic cleansing by Israelis’ and the ‘Israeli settlements [now] on town lands,’ its individual information as a town different from all others is, on some level, inconsequential.

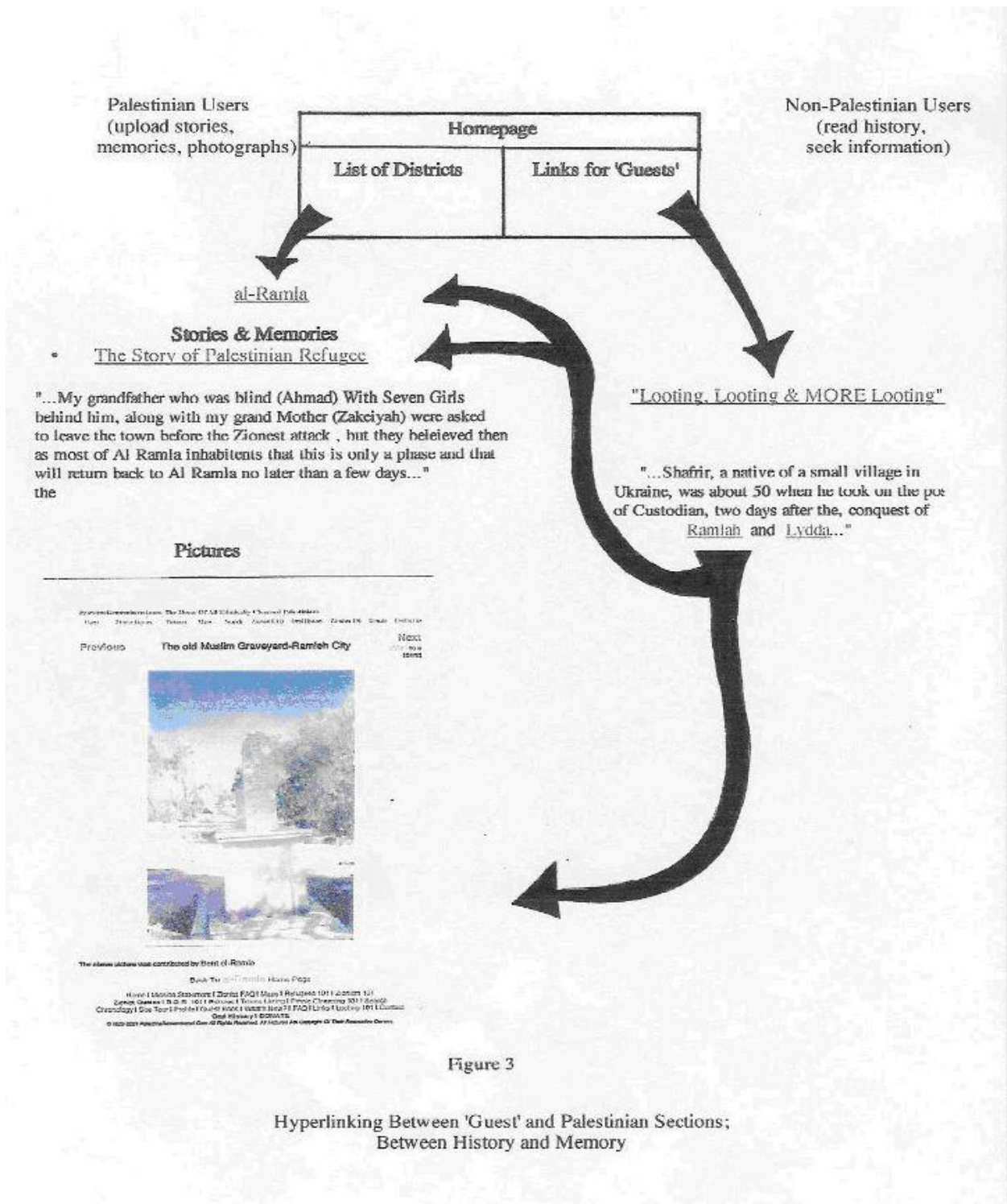
Given the comments in the message boards of most of the town and village sites, and given the fact that *All That Remains* is part of many Palestinians' home libraries, it is what follows each of these tables that draws the Palestinian user to the site.

Below a short paragraph on the 'Town Today,' a 'Stories and Memories' section and a 'Pictures' section both ask users to 'Add A New Story' and 'Add A New Picture' themselves. Further down we are asked to 'Add A New URL' to the list of related links, to contribute to 'Ayn al-Zaytun's 'Message Board' and to 'Add Your Name' – the name of your 'Clan/Hamolah' – and your 'Country of Residence' to 'Ayn al-Zaytun's '411 Directory Service' (see Appendix II). It is thus unmistakably clear that the 'Ayn al-Zaytun site – and every other town and village site on *Palestineremembered.com* – is a space for Palestinians.

If we had instead followed one of the fifty-nine links for people less familiar with the history of the Palestinians, we would have arrived in a very different place: The '[Looting, Looting and More Looting](#)' link would have sent us to an excerpt from Israeli historian/journalist Tom Segev's '1949, The First Israelis'; '[Palestine Population, 1860-2000](#)' would have sent us to a history by Justin McCarthy; and '[Zionism and Its Impact](#)' would have sent us to an essay by Ann M. Lesch. Unlike the fourteen districts, which open up to pages meant for Palestinian users to fill with their names, photographs, memories and stories, these links feed the non-Palestinian user information, presented in the form of greater History (see Figure 3), not unlike the history-telling epoch of the resistance movement, which Nora would oppose with memory: 'the difference between real memory – social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies – and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past' (Nora 1989: 8). The linking (literally!) between history and memory on this site means that the separation between them, upon which Nora insists, may not be as certain as it appears.

As they explain the history of the Palestinians, the articles, essays and excerpts to which these links lead refer to Palestinian cities and towns. So, when Segev refers to [Ramlah](#) and [Lydda](#), both cities are hyperlinked so that the user can, while reading, click on them. Doing so brings the reader to the [Ramlah](#) and [Lydda](#) district pages, directly into the stories and photographs Palestinians users are – simultaneously, even! – uploading onto the site as they exchange experiences, thoughts and memories (see Figure 3 overleaf).

So, while for Palestinians who already know about Palestinian history (and therefore use the town links directly) *Palestineremembered.com* is a space for sharing stories and memories, for non-Palestinians linking through the fifty-nine other links, the site is a source of history. In this sense we see a reversal of the trend in the *jil al-thawra* whereby people themselves were *lieux de memoire*, storers of history. With the Internet, websites take on the role of *lieu* and the Palestinians whose memories are being stored are instead its content, something Levinson suggests is common online, where 'users become content in the lines of text they create' (Levinson 1999: 39).



The structure of the site exerts a subtle power over non-Palestinian users, taking them on a set politico-historical journey – as though telling them, ‘you are free to wander, as our guest, but it is not for you to give this space meaning.’ By contrast, for Palestinian users – whose ‘passport’ in this space is their already knowing Palestinian history, having memories or photographs of Palestine, the space of Palestineremembered.com is theirs to inscribe with meaning, edit and, ultimately, construct. This guest/host, belonging/not belonging dynamic is characteristic of other Palestinian-related on-line activities as well. Anderson recounts that:

[o]n an electronic mailing list devoted to discussions among Palestinians, limits on access were waived to admit Israelis professing sympathies with the Palestinian cause; but their interventions to 'provide information' were repeatedly censured as 'Zionist' violations of a Palestinian space, that is, an on-line home for Palestinians ordered by guest-host relations in which they were charged with being bad guests. (Anderson 1999: 46)

It is in part because of this practice of subtle exclusion that it is possible to understand Palestineremembered.com as a 'virtual homeland'; a space, in other words, where some users are visitors, and others belong.

4.3.2 *A Virtual Homeland?*

While Palestineremembered.com is a space where Palestinians can belong and inscribe meaning, it is unreasonable to suggest that this meaning compares with that inscribed on the physical land of Palestine by its Palestinian inhabitants before 1948. Palestinian history, Palestinians' current lack of a state in which they belong, and that Palestinian refugees' 'right of return' has not been recognized by Israel have together kept Palestinians' attachment to the land of Palestine very real, even five generations after the *nakba*.

This is not to say that the concept of a virtual homeland is by definition unreasonable. One could easily imagine a transnational, virtual community of pet-lovers, for example, exchanging stories, photographs and memories of pets online, 'emplacing' the pages of a website dedicated to their topic. Because such a community's identity as pet-lovers is not, we can assume, related to a single territory, the virtual space in which they meet might suffice as their pet-loving homeland. For Palestinians, on the contrary, who they *are* when they join in 'belonging' in, and inscribing meaning onto, a virtual Palestine is irreducibly linked to the *land* they came from. No number of exclusive websites, vivid photographs or moving memories from long-lost relatives online can replace the homeland as it once was. Hadden and Cowan propose what I think is a useful metaphor for understanding websites and cyberspace, at least insofar as cases like the Palestinian one are concerned: '[R]ather than replace the living, breathing relationship a Zen student has with his or her teacher, the cyber-monastery functions as an adjunct to the teacher' (Hadden and Cowan 2000: 11).

The ethnographic and political value, then, of a 'virtual Palestine' lies more in its ability to represent (both for the eyes of Palestinians and non-Palestinians) visions of Palestinian histories and of a future Palestinian homeland, serving also as a more far-reaching and 'democratic' forum for these to be negotiated. As Palestinians have, for decades now, been 'struggling for our self-determination but for the fact that we have no place, no agreed-upon and available physical terrain on which to conduct our struggle' (Said 1980: 123), cyberspace can provide temporary 'terrain' on which they conduct their struggle for other, more tangible terrains. For, as Appadurai aptly puts it, even '[i]n this new sort of world, the production of neighbourhoods increasingly occurs under conditions where the system of nation-states is the normative hinge for the production of both local and translocal activities' (Appadurai 1997: 188).

I think it appropriate to use the concluding Section that follows to elaborate on what kinds of visions of homeland virtual Palestine represents to its visitors, and to guess at who some visitors-cum-creators might be. As this has not been a paper dealing directly with questions of representation, nationalist politics, or identity, this conclusion is best read as a call for further research into the way each of these questions intersects with the emergence of 'virtual homelands' among diasporic groups in general, and with Palestinian historiography in particular.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

'... never before have individual histories been so explicitly affected by collective history, but never before, either, have the reference points for collective identification been so unstable.' (Augé, 37)

5.1 Rethinking Nora and Benjamin

The structure of Palestineremembered.com – whereby individual Palestinian stories and memories are used as historical evidence of the truth of Palestinian history to non-Palestinians (see Figure 3) – attests to the limits of the binaries proposed by both Nora and Benjamin. First, navigation through the site makes visible the cross-pollination, and co-creation, between history and memory, so that Nora's notion that history necessitates the eradication of memory is visibly implausible. Second, the critical influence of storytelling on history illustrates, by way of metaphor, the *explanatory* nature of storytelling that Benjamin denies in opposing storytelling and history-telling.

5.2 Rethinking Agency and Will into 'Emplacement'

Whereas the 'guest-host' dynamic between Palestinians and non-Palestinians is maintained structurally at Palestineremembered.com, it is clear from the site's Guestbook entries and message boards that Palestinian users, too, feel themselves to be the guests there. While simultaneously rewriting Palestinian history and offering it Westward to 'visiting' users, each Palestinian user also has a 'host' at the site. This host is comprised of other Palestinian users, who provide stories, memories, photographs, hope and encouragement electronically. It is this two-way exchange and virtual dependence, we could say, that makes this corner of cyberspace a place, in opposition to a site that aims simply to project information outward. That Palestineremembered.com thus differs noticeably from many other Palestinian-related websites in the extent to which it has become 'emplaced' through storytelling online is therefore a warning against applying Hammond's argument uncritically, i.e. without considering matters of agency and will. 'Belonging' in and inhabiting a virtual Palestine like Palestineremembered.com do not arise out of the combined practices of storytelling, memory-sharing and the establishment of a 'guest-host' distinction between Palestinians and non-Palestinians alone. Insofar as Palestineremembered.com has been 'emplaced' this has occurred because there is a will, drawn as it may be from scattered individuals, to have such a common space in order to pursue these practices. Conversely, if websites created as 'windows' for the West to look 'inside' the Palestinian struggle in camps and under occupation cannot, upon further research, be considered 'emplaced,' it is again because of a (different) common will – or lack thereof.

5.3 Visions of Homeland Online

While Palestine online is, finally, only virtual, it offers a global audience an alternative representation of Palestinian aspirations nonetheless. This sub-section attempts an initial look at what those representations might be, with an eye towards the significance not only of what is being represented, but also by whom.

On one level, Palestineremembered.com resembles Palestine today. The parts of Palestine that are not within Israel – the West Bank and Gaza – are spaces where Palestinians still live, are recognized to belong, tell stories, share experiences. They are also spaces where non-Palestinians increasingly go as visitors to learn more about 'the Palestinian experience'. Through 'responsible tours' such as those offered by Olive Cooperative (OliveCoop 2005) and other, activism-based

solidarity projects, non-Palestinians (especially Europeans and Americans) go to the West Bank and Gaza to explore ‘The Conflict for Beginners,’ and to ‘Witness the Destruction of [towns like] ‘Imwas’ firsthand (Palestinian Solidarity Campaign 2005).

If virtual Palestine partly represents the land of Palestine today, it may also represent the ‘Palestinian condition’ as it has developed over decades in exile:

The quintessential Palestinian experience, which illustrates some of the most basic issues raised by Palestinian identity, takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short, any one of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified. (Khalidi 1997: 1)

Khalidi raises the issue of the interface on the first page of *Palestinian Identity*. In describing Palestinian identity, his first words are neither about homeland, nor about exile, but about those spaces in between. The interfaces to which he refers are controlled by others (border police, airport immigration officials) and tend to exclude Palestinians from countries and rights. On the Internet Palestinians find themselves at an interface again, this time an interface not controlled by hostile forces, but by themselves. As has been repeatedly elaborated, to be Palestinian has, in some ways, come to mean being in *between* places, in nonplaces or, as renowned Palestinian writer Fawaz Turki has put it, to feel exile itself is a homeland, illustrating Said’s point that ‘to be a Palestinian at all has been to live in a utopia, a nonplace, of some sort’ (Said 1980: 124).

That Palestineremembered.com exerts control over non-Palestinian visitors’ movements, however, differentiates ‘virtual Palestine’ from Palestine today in an important way. Today, Palestine is occupied and, therefore, Palestinians living under occupation cannot control the borders of their lands, nor those within them. Rather, it is an occupying power that pens off areas instructing ‘Palestinians this way’ (Palestine Monitor 2004).

Palestineremembered.com, then, is more a monument to a *future* Palestinian homeland – in the form of a Palestinian state, perhaps – in which Palestinians will be able to control their own and other people’s movement on their own land for the first time. This would be a homeland in which Palestinians control their borders – as a Palestinian nation – but also accommodate local prides, forms of dissent and other versions of belonging within those borders. As such, it represents a set of aspirations with roots both in pre-1948 Palestine and in over five decades of defining the Palestinian struggle under occupation, and in exile.

Interest in the integrity of borders, in a sense of belonging to the land, and local pride in the village date back to life in the pre-1948 homeland (Khalidi 1997: 153; Schulz 2004: 108; Gubser 1978: 122), and:

these local associations are still meaningful to the degree that people can often be easily identified as to their place of origin by their family name, and to some degree remain identified with these places, even if they have never lived there. (Khalidi 1997: 153)

The site’s attention to the ‘clan/hamolah’ of each town and village (as opposed to nuclear families) also marks a return to pre-1948 Palestine, as in the diaspora there had until recently been ‘a trend away from the hamulah structure and a reinforcement of nuclear families’ (Schulz 2004: 176; see also Pappé 2004: 152).

However, pre-1948 Palestine was a land of class distinctions as well. In the first half of the 20th century Ottoman reforms and Palestine’s increased integration into the global capitalist market had ‘sharpened class differences as individual landowners expanded their holdings and peasants

were reduced to sharecroppers or wage laborers’, and these ‘class differences became strongly politicized by the 1930s...’ (Lesch 1985: 118). To the extent, then, that virtual Palestine reifies peasant life in pre-1948 Palestine and ‘[u]rban life, class and economic tensions are erased and kept out of the stories’ (Schulz 2003:110), it expresses elements of the Palestinian national movement that developed in the 1960s and 1970s. This ‘radical populism’ levelled class and other socio-economic differences in the name of regaining a shared Palestinian homeland (Tamari 1991: 65; Lesch 1985: 119; Brynen 1995: 33).

The reification of village and peasant life may also represent a return to the ‘steadfastness’ traditionalist nationalism Tamari argues existed before radical populism. This notion is compounded by the fact that the imagery and written content of Palestineremembered.com makes almost no reference to the Palestinian resistance movement nor to other post-1948 Palestinian activities. With the ‘war on terror’ still raging, Arafat gone and Israel’s ‘security’ barrier incorporating more of the West Bank into Israel every day, Palestinians may well feel that ‘steadfastness’ is at this point all they have left with which to resist. In that the site focuses primarily on refugees’ ‘right of return’, it is also an expression of many Palestinians’ disillusionment during the 1990s with the Palestinian Authority’s neglect of that issue (Schulz 2003: 149).

5.4 Political and Historiographical Implications

There are, however, important differences between these representations as they appear to resemble trends in pre-1948 Palestine or during the Generation of the Revolution, on the one hand, and the material conditions of the largely diasporic, English-speaking, young, professional Palestinians who visit (or ‘populate’) Palestineremembered.com. These conditions, in turn, differ greatly from those experienced by Palestinians still living in the refugee camps of the Middle East, who have for decades faced incomparable obstacles. In terms of regional distribution, in other words, virtual Palestine mainly represents a new, North American or European professional Palestinian elite. Because older generations tend to be less familiar with the Internet, this elite is also uniquely young, reflecting the recently documented alienation of the fourth and fifth refugee generations from older generations (Chatty 2005). Indeed, virtual Palestine may reflect Rex Brynan’s argument that the ‘composition of the emerging Palestinian elite is still in a state of flux... [and this] elite is far broader than the usual categorizations of traditional/modern or social class...’ (Brynen 1995: 40).

Many Palestinian websites are considered ‘windows’ into the Palestinian reality, often in the form of daily eyewitness reporting by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. These create counter-representations of life under occupation in the face of a mainstream, Western, corporate media that fails to address most critical issues faced by Palestinians there. It is in this context of alternative media portrayals and coverage that Palestinian websites are most often understood, and with good reason (see for example Stohlman and Aladin 2003).

The case of Palestineremembered.com presents this approach with questions about the concerns of (English-speaking) Palestinians in the diaspora, who seem to demand different types of ‘windows’ into ‘the Palestinian experience’: namely, insights into the experiences of their own extended families, or clans, and of their particular villages of origin. Unlike in many occupation-, *Intifada*-, or refugee camp-related sites, what is being expressed in the webmaster-created – and much of the user-submitted – content of Palestineremembered.com is a widespread desire as much for freedom to reconnect with specific people and pasts as to attain some sort of self-determination. It is worth exploring whether such a desire is inconsistent with the political

demands of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, who are the major focus – albeit often negative – of American and Israeli decision-makers today.

If this online Palestinian space is inhabited especially by a younger, diasporic, English-speaking and professional Palestinian elite, what political role can this elite play through the Internet compared with that played by occupied or camp Palestinians, for whom decades of severe hardship have shaped politics quite differently? Generally speaking, for the scattered Palestinians of the North American and European diaspora, a space such as the Internet can be imbued with meaning – and is, for many, the space through which individuals reconnect with particular people and pasts – whereas for Palestinians in Lebanese camps and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, it serves as a ‘window’ to the outside world and vice versa. It is therefore easy to imagine that the two groups (one diasporic and the other dispossessed or displaced *in situ*) point in significantly divergent directions, not least in terms of conceptions of space itself. While younger generations in the diaspora may seek, above all, a space in which to recover each other, retrace their family trees and village footpaths, those Palestinians whose basic political, civil, and economic rights are daily trampled instead search for a space free of tanks, soldiers, bulldozers, walls, and checkpoints, before anything else.

It is noteworthy that Palestineremembered.com’s elite users choose to use their newly centralized space in Palestineremembered.com to preserve memories and stories of Palestine decades ago, on the one hand. While, on the other hand, Palestinians in Palestine itself use their limited common spaces to hold demonstrations against the occupation, to put up posters remembering and documenting recent Palestinian casualties of the occupation, and even to erect exhibitions on the Holocaust, as was recently documented in a Palestinian town in the West Bank. These latter forms of ‘preservation,’ or archiving, as Nora would call it, attest to a fundamentally presentist approach on the part of Palestinians ‘at home’ in Palestine, all with an eye towards ensuring (‘preserving’) a feasible *future*. While demonstrations may be dangerous, they are attended in an effort to preserve the physical continuation of later generations of Palestinians on the land; ‘martyr’ posters cover Palestinian walls in part to preserve the dignity of those who have died, while preserving communities’ focus on their common resistance efforts; and, the seemingly paradoxical creation of a Holocaust museum in a Palestinian town in the West Bank can be read as a vital step in preserving the peace behind the agreement that will finally be reached in the region. How can these presentist uses of common space be understood in light of the (perhaps predictably) nostalgic preoccupation of diasporic elite Palestinians with using their virtual common space to pursue the details of their own peasant pasts?

Further, it would thus be useful to ask whether a virtual Palestine ‘inhabited’ by such an elite perhaps affords some members of this elite the luxury of lamenting their history, of expressing dreams for a just future, while not participating directly in their realization. Though cynical, this view is supported by the low number of North-American Palestinians involved in ‘direct action’ solidarity campaigns, for example.

It is arguable that the interests of this diasporic ‘elite’ – as they are expressed in websites such as Palestineremembered.com – are crucial to the development of a viable solution to the current state of things in Israel/Palestine, and that their presence online is a form of activism. For it is in the name of this group, in part, that Palestinian refugees’ famous ‘right of return’ remains on the negotiating table. On some level, in other words, members of the Palestinian diaspora thus speak for Palestinians still in the camps of the Middle East, though the extent to which they are in a position to ‘represent’ them remains unclear. A cursory glance at the Palestinian messages that fill the site’s ‘Guestbook’ reveals a ‘spontaneity’ of positive feeling in comments relating to the experiences of seeing new photographs, having personal (familial and friendly) exchanges and

discovering old memories. This ‘spontaneity’ stands out beside other, more ‘formulaic’ comments expressing a desire to return to the homeland, Palestine. Were American and Israeli policy makers to tune in to the voices at Palestineremembered.com, then, accepting the ‘right of return’ might appear less daunting, as it is becoming ever clearer that – while symbolically essential – doing so would yield visits to places and relatives far more than it would ‘return’ in any permanent sense.

One avenue in considering the possibilities for political action leads again to Nora’s suggestion that in France (and in the greater West) history is increasingly eroding memory. Is a Western public prepared to take seriously stories derived from memories delivered second-, third-, and fourth-hand on a website, more than it would a museum exhibit, New York Post article, or Fox5 special about the Palestinians? More specifically, does today’s scope of ‘effective’ political action include such a site among its actors, or do Palestinian users of the site inadvertently cast themselves to the political sidelines by focusing on memories and storytelling rather than today’s political debates? These questions point not only to the ‘packaging’ (memorializing or presentist, for example, if this binary is to be trusted) necessary for political causes such as the Palestinians’ to gain U.S. support, and to the variety of aspirations each ‘cause’ contains within it, but also to the compatibility of ‘emplaceable’ corners of the Internet with ‘effective’ political action itself.

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APPENDIX I: LIST (PARTIAL) OF PALESTINIAN-RELATED WEBSITES AND ONLINE CHAT FORUMS

- ACROSS BORDERS PROJECT (2004) Homepage (online). Available from: <<http://www.acrossborders.ps/AB/>> (Last Accessed 17 May 2005).
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- SHAML: PALESTINIAN DIASPORA AND REFUGEE CENTRE (2004) Homepage (online). Available from: <<http://www.shaml.org/zshaml/site/>> (Last Accessed 17 May 2005).
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APPENDIX II: PALESTINEREMEMBERED.COM – SAMPLE TOWN PAGE: ‘AYN AL-ZAYTUN:

<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Safad/Ayn-al-Zaytun/index.html>

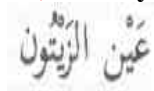
PalestineRemembered.com The Home Of All Ethnically Cleansed Palestinians

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‘Ayn al-Zaytun
District Of Safad
Ethnically cleansed
20,896 days ago



Sharpen Your Arguments



- [Town Statistics & Facts](#)
- [Town Today](#)
- [Stories and Memories](#)
- [Pictures](#)
- [Related Town Links](#)
- [Message Board](#)
- [411 Directory Service](#)

Choose Another Town In Safad

Or Choose Another District




[eMail to a friend](#)
[ترجمالى العربية](#)
Powered by [Ajeeb](#)

Town Statistics & Facts

Statistic/Fact	Value
Israeli occupation date	1st-2nd of May 1948
Distance from district center	1.5 (km) North East of Safad
Elevation from the sea	700 (meters)
Map location	See location number #61 on the map
Israeli acts of terror	During the battle the majority of the male inhabitants fled the town, and soon after occupation the remaining ‘Ayn al-Zaytun women, children, and senior citizens were rounded by the Palmah troops and then ethnically cleansed with shots fired over their heads to speed their evection from their homes. On the 3rd of May, some of the village inhabitants attempted to come back to their homes, but they were fired upon and one person was killed (Benny Morris , p. 102).
Village remains after destruction by Israelis	On May 3rd 1948, the village was mostly destroyed with the exception of few deserted house.
Ethnically cleansing by Israelis	‘Ayn al-Zaytun inhabitants were completely ethnically cleansed.
Land ownership before occupation	Ethnic Group
	Land Ownership (Dunums)
	Arab 1,054

	Jewish	0
	Public	46
	Total	1,100 (757 cultivable)
Population before occupation	Year	Population
	1596	622
	19th century	200-350
	1931	567
	1945	820
Number of houses	In (1931): 127	
Nearby wadies & rivers	The village was situated on the western slopes of Wadi al-Dilb	
Israeli settlements on town lands	No settlements on village lands	

[Click here](#) for more information about ‘Ayn al-Zaytun in Arabic and [click here](#) for more information in **Hebrew**. 

[Bibliography and references](#)

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Town Today

According to the Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi, all that remains of the village: *The rubble of destroyed stone houses is scattered throughout the site, which is otherwise overgrown with olive trees and cactuses. A few deserted houses remain, some with round arched entrances and tall windows with various arched designs. In one of the remaining houses, the smooth stone above the entrance arch is inscribed with Arabic calligraphy, a fixture of Palestinian architecture. The well and the village spring also remain*

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Stories and Memories

- [simple story](#)

Add A New Story

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Pictures

- [All What Remains Of The Village In 1987 \(39K\)](#)
- [Ayn al-Zaytun before destruction and occupation- لالتحال لبق نوتيزلا ني ع \(93K\)](#)
- [‘Ayn al-Zaytun’s mosque, now barn for animals, نوتيزلا ني ع دجسم راقبا قبيرز \(113K\)](#)
- [نوتيزلا ني ع لالتحال خيرات اهيل عو قيربعلاب ةحول \(68K\)](#)

- [A picture inside the main sping in our village, نى عل ل خاد قروص \(79K\)](#)
- [علماً ان المسجد يقع على ..ولسوا قافتاب دددم ءيربع ءباتك هيل عر مظت , نوتيزلا نى ع دجس م \(159K\) دفص ىلا لصوملا عراشل](#)
- [يف هايمل رييس تل ءد عملما هايملما ءانق ر مظت , دجس ملما نم عبنى يذلا نوتيزلا نى ع عبن \(138K\) ىن بمل ءيواز](#)
- [\(210K\) هذه , نوتيزلا نى ع ءيرقل حض او رثا](#)
- [\(281K\) دجس ملل نم يالا بن اءلا نم نى علما عبنم](#)
- [\(195K\) راقبالل ءبىرز ىلا لوح يذلا , دجس ملل ىن اءلا قباطلل ءيل خاد قروص](#)
- [\(258K\) ءين ارق ءى اهيل ع رفح ءيرج ح ءحول ر مظت دجس ملل ءبىرق قروص](#)
- [\(159K\) .-!!يقوم اليهود حالياً بترميمه لهدف ما , نوتيزلا نى ع يف ءيقب تملما تويبلما نم ىن بمل](#)
- [\(209K\) ي كذلك ترميمه حالياً رجي , نوتيزلا نى ع يف ءيقب تملما تويبلما نم ريبك تيب](#)
- [\(141K\) 2003 دفص ىلا يدؤملا عراشلا تحت ي رجت ءيرقلا عى بانى دحال فى رصت ءانق](#)
- [\(146K\) 2003 وقوفاً من الجانب الخلفي لمسجد عين الزيتون , دفص قن يدمل رظنم](#)
- [رى غ نم , ءيول ع قطنم يف تويبلما دحا ءيفل خلا يف رمظي , نوتيز قروص عم وا قنوح اط ر جح الواضح اذا كان الحجر مصدره من القرية و علماً ان اليهود يقومون مؤخراً بإنتزاع اثار القرى المهجرة واستخدام \(162K\) 2003 !!!م يدق عباط تاذ ءين بلاءاشنا يف اءراجا](#)
- [ض عب ر مظت ءل تلما ىل ع او دفص عراش ىل ع قروطنقل او عم اءلا رمظي ءيرقلا ع قوئل ماع رظنم \(94K\) 2003 عى بر - ءيرقلا قريقم نم ءيقابلما روبقلا](#)
- [18/5/2003 دجس ملما فلخ ءطق تلم قروص , نوتيزلا نى ع اهيل ع ءعق اولال لال تلل ماع رظنم \(109K\)](#)
- [18/5/2003 \(194K\) نى علما عبنم ثيح عم اءلا نم نم يالا بن اءلا](#)
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
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Message Board

Topic	Replies Count	Post Your Reply
Posted by Shady laham on JUNE-7-2005 	0	Reply

Hello im Fom palestine in safad from Ayn el Zaytoon and i live in sweden im 19 years old my name is from Shady Laham		
 Posted by Webmaster on MAY-7-2001 Last reply posted on FEBRUARY-4-2003 Sign 'Ayn al-Zaytun's Guest Book	4	Sign

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Shady laham	Laham	SKANE, SKANE
Hussam Chaabi	-	DENMARK
Ibrahim hassoun	Hasoun	HOMS, SYRIA
Khalil	Hammid	NY, U.S.A
Mohammad Hamid	HAMID	NY, USA
Khalid Hamid	Nimer/hamid	SWEDEN
Khader Ghorayb	Ghorayb	SYRIA, SYRIA
Abdulmonem hamid	HAMID	PARIS, FRANCE
Ahmad Hamid	Hamid	PALESTINE
ADNAN HAMMID	Hammid	CONNECTICUT, USA
RAMI	Hameed	-
Mariam Hamid	-	GERMANY
friend praiseworthy	-	-
Abdelrahim	Hamid	SKANE, SWEDEN

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APPENDIX III: PERSONAL NOTE

‘Ayn al-Zaytun Remembered, ‘Ayn al-Zaytun Revisited

A Personal Note

I learned about Palestineremembered.com from a childhood friend of mine, Alia, whose father and grandparents are Palestinians from the village of ‘Ayn al-Zaytun in the District of Safad, in what is now the north of Israel. In 1948, her grandparents fled Safad and eventually ended up in Ayn el-Hilweh refugee camp in Lebanon.

In 1982 their house in the camp was bombed, marking the second destruction of their home. They have yet to return to their lands or to visit Israel. Now all they have is memories and stories of Palestine.

With the Internet brought recently to their area, they were able to see photographs of ‘Ayn al-Zaytun as it was when they left it and as it is now, for the first time, through Palestineremembered.com.

In the summer of 2004 Alia and I travelled to ‘Ayn al-Zaytun, with her twin sisters. To find it we searched for the signs Alia remembered from her grandmother’s stories; we looked for a spring, a mosque, a fig tree. In the end, we found the all-but-destroyed village only because Alia not only had her grandmother’s stories, but also the images Alia had memorized from Palestineremembered.com.

The following page juxtaposes the photograph Alia had memorized, which finally led us to the fig tree, spring, and the discovery that the mosque was being used as a barn for cows, and a photograph I took of Alia and her sisters in front of the memorized ‘arch’ an hour later.



An arched entrance is all that remains of a village building. (June 1987) [AYN AL-ZAYTUN]



APPENDIX IV: PANESTINEREMEMBERED.COM – HOMEPAGE

www.palestineremembered.com

PalestineRemembered.com The Home Of All Ethnically Cleansed Palestinians

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Baysan

Beersheba

Gaza

Haifa

Hebron

Jaffa

Jerusalem

Jinin

Nazareth


al-Ramla

Safad

Tiberias

Tulkarm

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- ▶ FYI: Website Updates **100%**
- ▶ Introducing The Oral History Project **100%**
- ▶ The Conflict For Beginners
- ▶ Looting, Looting, & MORE Looting
- ▶ Zionist Frequently Asked Questions
- ▶ Famous Zionist Quotes
- ▶ Birth of The Palestinian Refugee Problem
- ▶ Quiz Yourself On Israeli Democracy
- ▶ Witness The Destruction Of 'Imwas
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- ▶ "The Palestinian Issue" By The U.N.
- ▶ Palestine Population, 1860-2000
- ▶ Tantura Massacre Exposed
- ▶ Zionism & Its Impact For Beginners
- ▶ Flyers To Promote The Website>
- ▶ Intel Built Its Plant On Looted Land!
- ▶ Poems Remembering Palestine
- ▶ The Camera, The Picture, & The Scene

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APPENDIX V: PALESTINEREMEMBERED.COM – SAMPLE OF PICTURE
UPLOADED BY PALESTINIAN USER

<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Tiberias/Hittin/Picture4760.html>

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The above picture was contributed by [Makbula Nassar](#)

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A picture inside the main sping in our village, ÕæÑÉ ĪÇÎá ÇÁÚíä

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APPENDIX VI: PALESTINEREMEMBERED.COM – SAMPLE STORY UPLOADED BY PALESTINIAN USER

<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Tiberias/al-Wa'ra-al-Sawda',-Khirbat/Story382.html>

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PalestineRemembered and still hot in our blood !

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Posted by [Assad Elabbasa](#) on JUNE-26-2001

On 15th May 1948 our homeland Palestine was occupied and a new Jewish state established.

My father and family were living peacefully in Fassota Land between Acre and Safad though our clan Al-Mawasi live In WARAT ' AL SAWDA west side of AL- MAJDAL where our grandfather MUSA al QADHEM ABU GHAIKH shrine exists. As war broke out in our area and Jews start killing and bombing our houses, my father among many thousands were ethnically cleansed and dismissed into South Lebanon. I was almost 3 years old and my mother was pregnant. After a long journey on bare foot and due to terror she got tired and gave birth on the roadside. It was a boy my father sheered. Misfortunatly my mother died and buried quickly and randomly between the rocks!!

I don't remember my mother's face or even recognize her grave!!

You can say I am motherless! My father carried me on his bach, pushed my elder sister Sameera by his strong right hand, holding the new born and marched into a Lebanese village Yattar.He gave the baby to a villager women whose name was Jalilah to give breast feeding and care. Misfortunatly. The baby died after 2 months and the grievous father moved to Al ' Mansouri village nearer to the sea shore where we got shelter and relief from Lebanese villagers, Red Cross and UN relief Agency (UNRWA).

Under the pressure of humanitarian needs my father shifted to Al Rashedieh Refugee Camp south of Tyre. My father got a small conical tent and promised to get another biggest if married so it happened!!

Though I was a little child I decided to return home and study well to change our bad situation.I never cried for a toy or played like Israeli children or attended a kindergarten. Direct to school to study and nothing but the highest marks and 1st class standing. Through my life of study and work I got appreciation certificates from different firms including UNICEF!!

But what is the use of certificates and papers if you don't have a wall to hang them over? If you are not allowed to build a house or you don't have any kind of human rights?

We decided to get our rights back with all means !!

PalestineRemembered and still hot in our breath and chests!

If you are the **above author** of the story, you can edit your story by clicking the button below

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APPENDIX VII: PALESTINEREMEMBERED.COM – THE ‘GUEST BOOK’

<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Palestine-Remembered/MessageBoard454.html>

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 Posted by [Webmaster](#) on MAY-8-2001

Sign Palestine Remembered's **Guest Book**

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A must read article before signing our guest book

Since the inception of Zionism in the late 19th century, its leaders have attempted to erect an impregnable IRON WALL for the sole purpose of making the indigenous people of Palestine lose hope. The road map for the Israeli leaders' policies towards the Palestinian people was clearly stated by [Ze'ev Jabotinsky](#), the father of the Israeli right, in an article published (quoted below) in Ha'aretz newspaper in 1923:

“... Settlement can thus develop under the protection of a force that is not dependent on the local population, behind an IRON WALL which they will be powerless to break down.a voluntary agreement is just not possible. As long as the Arabs preserve a gleam of hope that they will succeed in getting rid of us, nothing in the world can cause them to relinquish this hope, precisely because they are not a rubble but a living people. And a living people will be ready to yield on such fateful issues only when they give up all hope of getting rid of the Alien Settlers. Only then will extremist groups with their slogan ‘No, never’ lose their influence, and only then their influence be transferred to more moderate groups. And only then will the moderates offer suggestions for compromise. Then only will they begin bargaining with us on practical matters, such as guarantees against PUSHING THEM OUT, and equality of civil, and national rights.”

The day we lose hope, is the day Zionists win Palestine from its people. For Palestine's sake, we hope that day never comes, and for now we must Remember Palestine the best way we can.

Our date is 57 years late, we shall return.

 Posted by [borinapr@hotmail.com](#) on MAY-26-2005

I congratulate you on the excellent work you've done on this website. I would like to know, moreover, how can we possibly contribute. i can't contribute financially, but if you ever need any translation work (arabic-english- french), I'd be glad to do that, also if you want more photos.Thank you and keep up the good work

 Posted by [Nour Alziq](#) on MAY-21-2005

I was pleased actually to see the picture of that old man on Palestine Remembered holding his house's keys with a smile all over his face .. after what he went through from all the suffering, living in refugee camps all of his life, struggling to show the world what he is

fighting for.. with a simple key he is able to show the whole world that no matter what happen, no matter how much he lost, he is still a live and wants his home back.

A simple picture with deep meanings. We Palestenians are like an old olive tree, we'll never die,, we might get old , but our roots are so deep that no force in the whole world could make us give up our rights.

 Posted by [Ghassan Elsaadi](#) on MAY-20-2005

To Palestine;
To Yaser Arafat;
To every Palestinian;
One day we will be back;
One day we will be hand in hand in Jerusalem;
One day we will be free and have our own PALESTINE;
God willing this day will come no matter what,no matter when;


 Posted by [rand aloaidi](#) on MAY-18-2005

I am an iraqi girl who actully loves her country and Palestine. I actully feel like I am half palestinian too, even though both of my parents are iraq. I hope that God will bless Palestine and Iraq and they will be free as soon as possible.

Love
Rand Alobaidi

 Posted by [Theodor](#) on MAY-11-2005

nice, you really made me thinkin. i'm israeli and i do believe that a palestine country should be established in the west bank. the kind of country Jordan and Egypt should have let you establish between 1948-1967. Was there an Intifada against them? a hungry man will eat almost everything, the Jews in Israel in 1947 were really poor for agreeing to establish a country on less than half of the country, the palestinian didn't, they till don't. so let me ask you: do you really need a country no matter what cause the israeli occupation suffocates you, or can you wait for the right proposal. i, as a left-wing young zionist-israeli, hope you'll have a country as soon as possible, i guess Arafat didn't find it that urgent...

 Posted by [mario](#) on MAY-11-2005

good work. ciao

 Posted by [nizar manji](#) on MAY-8-2005

It is very sad what is happening to Palestinians. Inshallah, one day you will get your homes and country back, because, it is only Allah who will do the fair and just thing. May Allah bless you all and bring peace, love, unity, prosperity, justice, humanity, brotherhood to your country and to the whole world.....ameen nizar

 Posted by [H. Clark Griswold](#) on MAY-5-2005

Thank you.


 Posted by [Rob Craig](#) on MAY-5-2005

I am a young white European man who's eye's have been truly opened to the atrocities suffered

by the Palestinian people. I think that the message of truth is gradually starting to be seen in my country (England) by the people as a whole. It is the cowardly support of Israel's policy of murder by the U.S.A. that is the cause of the majority of the regions problems. I don't see an immediate solution, well not while the war mongerer George Bush jnr is in power, but let us hope that a solution will one day soon come and bring peace to the Palestinian people, and indeed the whole of the Middle East. Peace be with you, Rob.

 Posted by [palestonia](#) on MAY-4-2005

Thank you for making this historical information available for the world to read. As Palestinians, Arabs, and more importantly, human beings, it is our duty to educate the world one by one on the issue of Palestine, Zionist propaganda and the Palestinian refugee problem.

 Posted by [Andrew](#) on APRIL-22-2005

I like your web site. It is a shame some of us westerners have not studied history properly or what the Bible actually say's. Zionism has blinded most people to the real truth.

 Posted by [M.Kanaaneh](#) on APRIL-21-2005

يلاهأى إلى اصوصخو، عئارل اعقوملا اذه راوز عيمجى إلى لىلجلا نم ةراحلا يتايحت
يضاى اعوبسأل اىف تطقتل ا روصى لى عىالطال مكىكىمى. رجهملا ونطولا اىف ةىروفص
www.jalili48.com عقوم اىف، ةىروفص ضاقنأل (15/4/2005)

 Posted by [Ayshah Wazwaz](#) on APRIL-21-2005

Bismillah Arahman Arahim(In the Name of Allah Most Merciful and Most Benificent)
Asalam Alykum (Peace be Upon you)
This site is indeed a Marevelous site.

 Posted by [Thaer Jadallah](#) on APRIL-18-2005

Good work with the website.

 Posted by [Tarek El - Hallak](#) on APRIL-17-2005

sorry i wrote a commente and i forgot to write the name of the website
its www.tottio.friendpages.com

 Posted by [Tarek El - Hallak](#) on APRIL-16-2005

I SWEAR TO GOD IM GONNA KISS THE GROUND OF PALESTINE ON MY ARRIVAL.Hello fellas,long story to writebut im gonna start,My name is Tarek, i was born in kuwait in 1984, raised in lebanon and studied in Canada,I always believed that our weapon is education,i completed Computer Science on A+ and im going to my masters.Wishing to go to Palestine and stay there, live on bread, oil and an olive.Tired of this Life,tired of worrying about my future.Being poor on MY LAND is better than being a well off on others land.My Dad is Palestinian and so as I, For Ever and Ever. I send my regards to every person supported this website and helped in developing it.To all Palestinians "THE ONLY THING LEFT OF PALESTINE IS THE AQSA, KEEP IT CUDDLE IT AND NEVER LET GO,THIS IS PALESTINE". We shall return Palestine ,I Promise.Thank you all. This is my Website visit and leave a guestbook.thank you again.!!

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APPENDIX VIII: PALESTINEREMEMBERED.COM – SAMPLE DISTRICT PAGE:
SAFAD

<http://www.palestineremembered.com/SafadTownsSnapshot.html>

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[District Of Safad \(map\)](#)

[Safad City](#)

[Israeli Settlements](#)

Town	Occupation Date	Distance From District	Map Location	1944 Population	Arab Land Ownership	Jewish Land Ownership	Israeli Settlements
Abil al-Qamh	End of May 1948	32 (km) North East	1	330	3,116	1,327	Yuval
al-'Abisiyya	End of May 1948	28.5 (km) North East	15	1,510	13,671	1,257	'Amir , Sde Nechemya, and Kefar Szold
'Akbara	11th of May 1948	2.5 (km) South	70	390	3,167	0	None
'Alma	30th of October 1948	10 (km) North	39	950	17,240	0	'Alma
'Ammuqa	24th of May 1948	5 (km) North East	54	140	2,571	0	'Ammuqa
'Arab al-Shamalina	4th of May 1948	13 (km) South East	77	650	16,690	0	Almagor
'Arab al-Zubayd	20th April 1948	15 (km) North East	34	890	1,838	294	None
'Ayn al-Zaytun	1st-2nd of May 1948	1.5 (km) North East	61	820	1,054	0	None
Baysamun	25th of May 1948	16.5 (km) North East	30	20	2,057	0	None
Biriyya	1st-3rd of May 1948	1.5 (km) North East	62	240	408	5,170	Kibbutz Biriyya
al-Butayha	First half of May 1948	13 (km) South East	76	650	16,690	0	Almagor settlement and a picnic area known by Park ha-Yarden.
al-Buwayziyya	11th of May 1948	22 (km) North East	20	510	13,226	503	None
Dallata	10th-11th of May 1948	6 (km) North	46	360	9,072	0	Dalton
al-Dawwara	End of May 1948	27 (km) North East	17	1,100	2,547	2,573	Kibbutz 'Amir and Sde Nechemya
Dayshum	30th of October 1948	12.5 (km) North	36	590	22,393	0	Moshav Dishon
al-Dirbashiyya	End of May 1948	20 (km) North East	31	310	2,767	0	None
al-Dirdara	3rd of April 1949	13 (km) East	58	100	4,443	1,829	None
Fara	30th of October 1948	11.5 (km) North	38	320	7,225	0	Yir'on
al-Farradiyya	30th of October 1948	8 (km) South West	71	670	15,228	0	Qaddarim, Shefer, and Parod
Fir'im	2nd of May 1948	4 (km) North East	63	740	2,023	163	Chatzor ha-Gelilit settlement is nearby village lands.
Ghabbatiyya	30th of October 1948	12 (km) North West	49	60	2,381	0	None
Ghuraba	1st of May 1948	22 (km) North East	25	220	2,935	478	Gonen
al-Hamra'	1st of May 1948	24.5 (km) North East	18	N/A	N/A	N/A	Shamir
Harrawi	20th-25th of May 1948	18 (km) North East	32	N/A	2,255	1,471	Ramat Naftali is close by village lands
Hunin	11th-14th of May 1948	28.5 (km) North East	8	1,620	13,623	486	Misgav 'Am and Margaliyyot (settled by Iraqi and Yamani Arab Jews)

al-Husayniyya	21st of April 1948	11 (km) North East	43	340	3,556	1,753	Chulata and Sde Eli'ezer
Jahula	24th-25th of May 1948	11 (km) North East	24	420	1,991	583	Yiftach is nearby village lands
al-Ja'una	9th of May 1948	5 (km) East	66	1,150	824	7	Ro'sh Pinna
Jubb Yusuf	4th of May 1948	6 (km) South East	73	170	11,230	0	'Ammi'ad
Kafr Bir'im	Early November 1948	11.5 (km) North West	41	710	12,244	0	Bar'arn and Dovev
al-Khalisa	11th of May 1948	28 (km) North East	11	1,840	10,773	0	Qiryat Shemona
Khan al-Duwayr	20th-25th of May 1948	35 (km) North East	4	260	2,163	3,054	Dafna and Dan are close by village lands
Karraza, Khirbat	First half of May 1948	8.5 (km) South East	72	N/A	N/A	N/A	Khorazin and Amnon
al-Khisas	25th of May 1948	31 (km) North East	7	530	1,480	2,738	ha-Gosherim
Khiyam al-Walid	20th-25th of May 1948	25.5 (km) North East	23	280	161	3,901	Lahavot ha-Bashan
Kirad al-Baqqara	22nd of April 1948	11 (km) North West	53	360	2,141	121	Gadot and Mishmar ha-Yarden
Kirad al-Ghannama	22nd of April 1948	11 (km) North East	47	350	3,795	175	Ayyelet ha-Shahar and Gadot are nearby village lands
Lazzaza	21st of May 1948	27.5 (km) North East	12	330	377	942	Beyt Hillel
Madahil	30th of April 1948	30 (km) North East	13	N/A	N/A	N/A	Kefar Szold
al-Malikiyya	30th of October 1948	15.5 (km) North East	29	360	7,326	0	Malkiyya and an Israeli Army base.
Mallaha	25th of May 1948	16 (km) North East	33	890	1,838	294	Yesud ha-Ma'ala is nearby village lands.
al-Manshiyya	24th of May 1948	30 (km) North East	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	Beyt Hillel and ha-Gosherim
al-Mansura	25th of May 1948	31 (km) North East	10	360	1,254	175	Sha'ar Yashuv
Mansurat al-Khayt	Early July 1949	11.5 (km) East	65	200	0	0	Kefar ha-Nasi' is nearby village lands
Marus	30th of October 1948	7 (km) North East	45	80	3,181	0	None
Mirun	29th of October 1948	5 (km) West	60	290	6,765	5,839	Meron
al-Muftakhira	16th of May 1948	25.5 (km) North East	22	350	5,414	3,596	Shamir and Lahavot ha-Bashan
Mughr al-Khayt	2nd of May 1948	4.5 (km) North East	59	490	6,141	384	The settlements of Chatzor ha-Gelilit and Ro'sh Pinna are nearby village lands
al-Muntar, Khirbat	9th of July 1949	8.5 (km) East	64	N/A	52	2,407	Machanayim is nearby village lands
al-Nabi Yusha'	17th of May 1948	17 (km) North East	26	70	3,616	0	Ramot Naftali
al-Na'ima	14th of May 1948	26 (km) North East	16	1,240	4,450	2,414	Ne'ot Mordekhay, Kefar Blum, and Beyt Hillel
Qabba'a	2nd of May 1948	6 (km) North East	57	460	13,437	0	Chatzor ha-Gelilit is nearby village lands
Qadas	28th-29th of May 1948	17 (km) North East	27	390	10,644	3,491	Yiftach, Malkiyya, and Ramot Naftali
Qaddita	11th of May 1948	17 (km) North	52	240	2,440	0	Sifsofa and Dalton settlements are nearby the

							village.
Qaytiyya	20th of May 1948	28 (km) North East	14	940	4,682	183	Kefar Blum and Beyt Hillel are near by village lands
al-Qudayriyya	4th of May 1948	6.5 (km) South	75	390	12,487	0	Kachal
al-Ras al-Ahmar	30th of October 1948	8.5 (km) North	42	620	7,931	0	Kerem Ben Zimra
Sabalan	30th of October 1948	15.5 (km) West	48	70	1,262	0	None
Safsaf	29th of October 1948	7 (km) North West	50	910	5,344	0	ha-Shahar and Bar Yochay
Saliha	30th of October 1948	12 (km) North	35	1,070	11,730	0	Yir'on and Avivim
al-Salhiyya	25th of May 1948	25 (km) North East	19	1,520	4,528	789	Kefar Blum is nearby village lands
al-Sammu'i	30th of October 1948	4 (km) West	68	310	9,713	0	Kefar Shammay and Amirim
al-Sanbariyya	Second half of May 1948	31.5 (km) North East	5	130	2,284	198	Ma'yan Barukh and Dafna
Sa'sa'	30th of October 1948	12 (km) North East	44	1,130	12,822	0	Sasa
al-Shawka al-Tahta	14th of May 1948	31.5 (km) North East	3	200	2,009	0	Dan and Dafna
al-Shuna	Early May 1948	6 (km) South	74	170	3,476	0	A wildlife sanctuary known by the Nachal 'Amud Reserve
Taytaba	30th of October 1948	5 (km) North	51	530	8,441	0	Dalton is nearby village lands
Tulayl	Late April 1948	14.5 (km) North East	40	340	3,556	1,753	Yesud ha-Ma'ala and Chulata are nearby the village
al-'Ulmaniyya	20th of April 1948	14.5 (km) North East	37	260	1,169	0	Yesud ha-Ma'ala
al-'Urayfiyya	Second half of May 1948	21.5 (km) North East	28	N/A	N/A	N/A	None
al-Wayziyya	First half of May 1948	8.5 (km) North East	56	100	0	3,673	The settlement Machanayim is nearby village lands
Yarda	3rd of April 1949	10.5 (km) North East	55	20	1,368	N/A	Ayyelet ha-Shahar and Mishmar ha-Yarden
al-Zahiriyya al-Tahta	Possibly the 10th of May 1948	1 (km) South	67	350	6,771	0	Jewish Safad has engulfed the village center.
al-Zanghariyya	4th of May 1948O	8.5 (km) South East	69	840	27,856	0	Elifelet and the private farm of Kare Deshe
al-Zawiya	End of May 1948	23 (km) North East	21	760	3,797	0	The settlement of Ne'ot Mordekhay is nearby village lands.
al-Zuq al-Fawqani	21st of May 1948	32 (km) South East	2	160	1,789	0	Yuval settlement is near by village lands.
al-Zuq al-Tahtani	11th of May 1948	30 (km) North East	9	1,050	9,368	1,630	Beyt Hillel

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