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Miriyam Aouragh

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Cyber Intifada and the
Construction of a Virtual Community
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ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom
ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties
ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Aula der Universiteit
op maandag 7 april 2008, te 14:00 uur

door

Miriyam Aouragh
geboren te Amsterdam

For those in Palestine, and elsewhere, who continue to defend humanity and defy oppression. And for Bachir Aouragh, from whom I learned not to accept a political status-quo just because it is the dominant one, or a social position just because others or the political-economic system structured it so.

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One decade of Groundbreaking Developments

1996	15/11/96 (Palestinian Independence Day): investors Telecom sector receive monopoly licence; First Palestinian ISPs (PalTel, Palestine Online, etc.) begin to offer internet connection; First Internet Cafe (IC) experiment; costs were 10-15 NIS per hour; Palestinian ICT initiative applies for *.PS* domain name at ICANN;
1997	Palestinian Telecom sector begin to operate; start of PalTel; First Palestinian website (Birzeit University) and first Homepages in Palestinian Diaspora; First Online Radio programme *OutLoad* (by the BZU team).
1999	First Arab Interface Website started by *Maktoob*; Increase of ICs, prices drop to 7-8 NIS an hour; Total (i.e. home *plus* Internet café access) Internet access rate estimated at: 3%.
	(Start final phase Peace Negotiations/Camp David)
2000	mIRC chat programme becomes popular in Internet Cafes; Arab email and chat programmes popularize; Amman-Net website offers radio programmes via Jordan/Palestinian frequency; ICANN appoints *.PS* domain name to Palestine.
	(Intifada breaks out on September 29; Palestine endure extreme social-economic/territorial transformation)
2001	Costumers use webcam and microphone during MSN/Messenger/and Chat sessions; ICs price-war in the cities, prices drop further to 4 NIS an hour; Total (i.e. home *plus* Internet café access) Internet access rate estimated at: 6%.
2002	Successful Palestinian PR campaigns through websites such as *Electronic Intifada, Palestine Monitor*; Hamas' *Palestine-Info* develops into a successful Palestinian website.
	(Re-occupation of West Bank/closure of Gaza; extreme isolation Palestinian society)
2004	PalTel introduces direct internet connection service, bypassing all ISPs; Total (i.e. home *plus* Internet café access) Internet access rate estimated at: 20%.
2005	*Google* enables Arab search tools; (R)Evolution of websites: from Homepages to *Blogs*; RSS-feeds outdo classic hyperlink reference; Hamas' *Palestine-info* becomes important source/reference; PalTel penetration rate for direct (home) internet connection reaches: 11%
	(Hamas joins elections overthrows Fatah; historic political shift in power balance)
2006	*YouTube* and other multimedia video/music programmes also popularize in Arab World; PalTel penetration rate direct (home) internet connection grows to: 18%; Intensive online involvement Palestinian political movements via internet forums; Total (i.e. home *plus* Internet café access) Internet access rate estimated at: 30%.

Chapter 1: Introducing the research—Virtual Reality from below

> "They can stop us at checkpoints and borders, but not on the Internet."
> Sharif Kanaana, 1999, Birzeit/Palestine

1.1 Research and Occupation

On a hot summer afternoon in 1999, after I had finished my MA research related to Palestine and returned to visit my friends there, I met Sharif Kanaana in his Birzeit University office to resume a previous discussion about the internet. "The Internet is the voice of the voiceless people, Palestinians can now share their diaspora experiences through websites and chat rooms." His rebellious words and my own experiences with this new tool showed me the political relevance of the internet.

Sheltered from the winter cold outside four years later in 2003, I sat in a comfortably heated lounge in one of the fancy hotels in Amman during my second fieldwork trip for PhD research. After spending months in Palestinian cities and refugee camps that were regularly closed off by Israeli curfew, the luxurious setting was rather outlandish. I waited in the lobby to meet Palestinian professor and activist Ibrahim Aloush; at that time we were both banned from entering Palestine.[1] The subject of our discussion was also the internet. Like Kanaana, Aloush viewed the internet with enthusiasm. We agreed that the internet harbours great potentials for overcoming physical closure and calling attention to oppression and undemocratic practices. But he was keen not to exaggerate this potential in terms of achieving major political successes. In his opinion, "the most superior form of political organization in our case has always been, and remains, direct and on-the-ground methods." Initially this surprised me because, as a critically engaged academic, he uses the internet extensively. The internet was both his public voice and a tool for political mobilization; he had initiated both the *Arab Nationalist* mailing list and the *Free Arab Voice* website.[2]

Kanaana and Aloush's views reflect different phases in considering the potentials of the internet. At the time I was analyzing the impact of the internet in Palestine and discussed this with Kanaana, the discussions were euphoric and evoked a sense of excitement; the internet was revolutionary. In the years that followed, the

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[1] As many journalists, researchers, solidarity activists, and above all, Palestinian exiles came to experience, neighbouring Jordan is the first choice for Israeli deportation. Jordan was also my temporary host during the research. While we both confront similar predicaments regarding Israel, we face very different impediments. After all, as a European citizen I can travel to most parts of the world. Moreover, as a Dutch citizen of North African descent I can still exercise my right to visit, or even settle in, the country of my grandparents. However, for Aloush, and other Palestinians in the diaspora, both options are, so far, impossible.

[2] See website on http://www.freearbvoice.org.

new technological possibilities indeed revolutionized many aspects of Palestinian communication. Aloush's caution can be seen as characteristic of later assessments of the political/economic potential of the internet. In terms of the social impact of excessive internet use, I occasionally heard of effects of alienation rather than activism and engagement, or was told not to misunderstand internet activism for offline resistance. Despite their cautions, both men enumerated the benefits of the internet for Palestinians. The internet could help defy the repression of everyday life in Palestine by overcoming the limitations of checkpoints and occupation and thus generate feelings of 'mobility' and 'political autonomy.' Kanaana and Aloush, each in his own way, integrated the internet, cyber space, and virtuality into new political constructions.

The enthusiastic suggestions about online possibilities also reveal something about *offline* limitations. They remind one that Palestinians do not enjoy political independence or freedom of movement and suggest that 'virtual' spaces provide alternatives for reaching inaccessible places. They elude to the absence of independent territorial places and free infrastructures necessary for free debate, free mobility, and free democratic decision-making. My conversation with Kanaana in the late 1990s took place at a time when the promises of the Oslo Agreement remained intangible.[3] Palestinian society was shifting—people were increasingly agitated by a life that was getting worse, and 'Oslo' had already become synonymous with despair. By 1998 my friends and contacts talked in terms of ´political betrayal´ and lack of hope. Though sometimes it did feel like any spark could cause an inferno in Palestine, I initially thought that a political implosion was not really possible.

By the time I worked out my ideas about the internet in Palestine and planned the research, the "explosion" was a reality. The outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000 positioned my work in a different context from what I had originally envisioned, disproving my earlier expectations. Only 18 months after that summer chat with Kanaana, what came to be known as the al-Aqsa Intifada dominated the whole of Palestinian society.[4] Stone throwers, street clashes, assassinations, and F-16 attacks were on the news all over the world. Mainstream 'Western' media propagated a picture of Israel that was prepared to make historic offers while Arafat turned his back on the negotiations and incited his people to revolt (Dor 2004). For many European and American viewers it seemed as if a period of calm and negotiations had been unexpectedly interrupted by Palestinian aggression. These oversimplified portrayals did not do justice to the complexity of the reality on the ground.

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3 Arafat and Rabin's signing of the declaration of principles (DoP) in Washington in 1993 symbolically sealed the Oslo Peace agreement. After uprisings and negotiations, Palestinians were promised autonomy. The core issues–refugees, Jerusalem, economic/military self-determination—were not addressed. Israel not only refused to abide by the minimum demands of the agreement, it also confiscated more land and continued to build settlements and by-pass roads on a larger scale than before the agreement was signed. For an analysis of the Oslo pitfalls see Said (1996), *Peace and its discontents: essays on Palestine in the Middle East peace process.*
4 The so-called "spark" was caused by Sharon's provocative visit to the Al Aqsa site.

But the situation did change in the case of cyber space. Compared to mainstream media, internet-mediated communication is better equipped to capture the complexity of the Palestinian situation. The internet provides an alternative space for grassroots voices and representations. It also relates to the reality on the ground in more complex ways. 'Virtual,' 'cyber,' 'online' representations of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are anchored in an offline face-to-face paradoxical reality. As I have come to learn, internet-based communication alternatives help to redress the Palestinian narrative; that of an occupied nation without a state lacking access to dominant media structures and missing some of the conventional tools for political mobilization. Studying the impacts of the internet therefore deepened my understanding of the way the Palestinian public sphere is affected by the widespread penetration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The internet is clearly used to overcome the enduring immobility/occupation that Kanaana spoke about. The 'tensions' revealed by these realities became central to my research which was increasingly shaped by ethnographic experiences.

Personal confrontations

I had just returned from a pilot fieldwork trip in Palestine in September 2001, less than a week before 9/11, when a new page was turned in Middle Eastern history. One year after the Palestinian uprising (Intifada) broke out, violence accelerated to a new height; hysteria, fear, disbelief dominated the world. Over and over, television screens showed images of airplanes penetrating the World Trade Centre buildings. Excessive mobile text messages and phone calls to and from Palestine blocked the mobile network several times. When I was finally able to reach the West Bank, all I could hear was shock and fear in his voice when a friend said '… this is not what we needed. You´l see; they will make us pay for this''. While we talked, the news channels showed images of Palestinians cheering, contextualized to accounts of people celebrating the 9/11 attacks.[5] Some of the pro-Israeli spin-doctors found new opportunities in this scenario, confirming my friends' worries about the pretext 9/11 would offer for further repression/stigmatization of Palestinians.

The American 'war on terror' that followed would lead to many political groups in the Middle East being branded 'terrorist'.[6] Simultaneously, the fear on the ground was that the newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would get a carte blanche to crush the Intifada.[7] This soon became reality; Israel's crackdown on the Palestinian uprising was characterized by violence and isolation: the peace process has been declared dead ever since. While media attention shifted to New York,

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[5] Many such media items later appeared to have been taken out of context or even fabricated. For an analysis of these kinds of *urban legends* see Janet, L Langlois (2005) "Celebrating Arabs": Tracing Legend and Rumor labyrinths in post-9/11 Detroit.

[6] This was later used as a pretext by other governments to blacklist their own dissident organizations.

[7] It must be noted that for many Arabs this MP in particular was detested: Sharon was the Minister of Defence that many remember for the "Qibia" (Palestine 1956) and Sabra and Shatilla massacres (Lebanon 1982).

Washington, Afghanistan, and then Iraq, collective punishment of Palestinians took place unnoticed and off-screen. In other words, the fusion of Bush and Sharon's doctrines in the years after 2001 continued to represent the systematic destruction of Palestinian livelihoods, albeit with less media coverage.

I managed to return to Palestine to conduct a longer fieldwork in 2002. Two words capture the reality of these post 9/11 Intifada years: closure and curfew. Curfews have a particularly paralyzing effect on society. When Israel applies a curfew upon Palestinians it is targeted at all people and institutions and often comes without warning. It is a military curfew, ordering everybody to remain at home. So the consequences are enormous. Businesses, government offices and pharmacies are closed, schools dismissed, and medical services inaccessible to the public. The total closure of towns and cities was accomplished by checkpoints, and Israeli jeeps, tanks and Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) in the streets make them inaccessible by blocking all entries. If the curfew takes place midday (often via loudspeakers notifying all to go home), within an hour the city turns into a ghost town.[8]

One of the first times I experienced a curfew, I soon grew impatient. I had no choice but to deal with the situation as it was; meetings were called off and interviews rearranged and I was able to get some supplies from the neighbours who owned a little shop. This house arrest was part of a 'collective punishment' that all residents had to undergo. To be forced not to go out on the streets and not being able to leave the house causes a sense claustrophobia/isolation. The only alternative was to call friends to hear how they dealt with the situation. One thing I knew for sure: the first thing I would do when curfew was lifted was to go to the supermarket to stockpile drinks and food, and then go to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) and get myself an internet connection at home. Being connected to the net made an immense difference when I was once more stuck in a curfew a few days later. And when a military attack took place during a curfew and phone contact or visits were impossible, I would surf the net for the latest news, or email/chat with friends to find out if they were targeted or had more news.

We are confronted with the internet in myriad ways: as researchers, as consumers, and sometimes as online information producers. While fieldwork illustrated the meaningfulness of direct access to media and communication tools, it also raised new questions. The importance of direct internet access in the Palestinian political context compelled me to understand Palestinian 'information society', or 'networked communities', in a historical/political context. Multi-sited research in specific territorial situations also required a mapping of the Palestinian context according to local differences.

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[8] Not much later, Israel embarked on a new great plan for closure: the Wall along and within the West Bank finalized this immense entrapment. The Palestinian economy suffered a severe recession and thousands of families were hardly able to stockpile enough to survive.

Different Palestinian sites

Delving into the impact of ICT in the different territorial settings of the research showed that the everyday localities I studied differed. Refugee camps in Palestine display both differences and similarities with refugee camps in the diaspora. In Palestine, the refugees are not exiled; they are not direct outsiders and even if they are located within geographic sites like Ama'ri camp or Dheishe camp, the borders are rather fluid, although this use to be more the case before stricter checkpoints were implemented in 2003 between the cities of Nablus, Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Hebron. After these military separations were established, movement was severely restricted in the West Bank (especially Qalqilia and Nablus) by the erection of the wall. Meanwhile, Gaza was basically cut into three parts by military borders.

The impact on Gaza is catastrophic. The city is much smaller than the West Bank, composing merely one-sixth of the occupied areas, but inhabited by one-third of the population in the Occupied Territories. With more than 1 million people, of whom a large majority is refugees, on merely two sq km, it has one of the highest population density in the world. This also meant that it is easier for the Israeli army to invade/arrest in the bigger (West Bank) Palestinian cities. I was told that whereas Gaza is more oppressed in terms of impoverishment and severely affected by being sealed off like an open prison; at least tanks and soldiers could not go in/out at will.[9]

Most protests in the West Bank take place in camps that lie at the entrance of cities and towns (such as Ama'ri and Dheishe). Youth stage clashes, throwing stones and rolling burning car tires, targeting jeeps and tanks that enter the cities, many children/teenagers from the camps participate in these activities. This also means the people in the camps often fall victim to acts of retaliation perpetrated by the Israeli army. The internet project in Ama'ri camp where I did research had to abort the project for a while. The Israeli army had invaded the camp, leaving traces of destruction behind; the women's centre (that was hosting the project) was disconnected from the internet because the tanks had trashed the electric post and phone cables. Figure 1 shows the main Palestinian camp locations and where I conducted research in the OT and Diaspora.

Beside these differences with the "inside" (the Palestinian Occupied Territories) settings, there are also differences with the "outside" (the diaspora). Military incursions by the Israeli army such as in Palestine do not occur in the diaspora for example, at least not since the war against the PLO in 1982, when Palestinian camps in Lebanon were directly attacked. Yet, while colonial segregation such as in Palestine is absent in the diaspora, it is social discrimination in Lebanon and Jordan that represents a non-legible burden for Palestinians. Also the history of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) during Black September in 1971 in Jordan; the Israeli invasions and civil war in Lebanon; the overcrowded and poorly maintained camps in Jordan and Lebanon, present other markers of difference.

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[9] The last three years showed the other side of the coin: the dense geography of Gaza is the argument the Israeli army often uses for massive air force attacks on Gaza.

Figure 1: Three fieldwork sites/phases (original map from UNRWA website 2002)
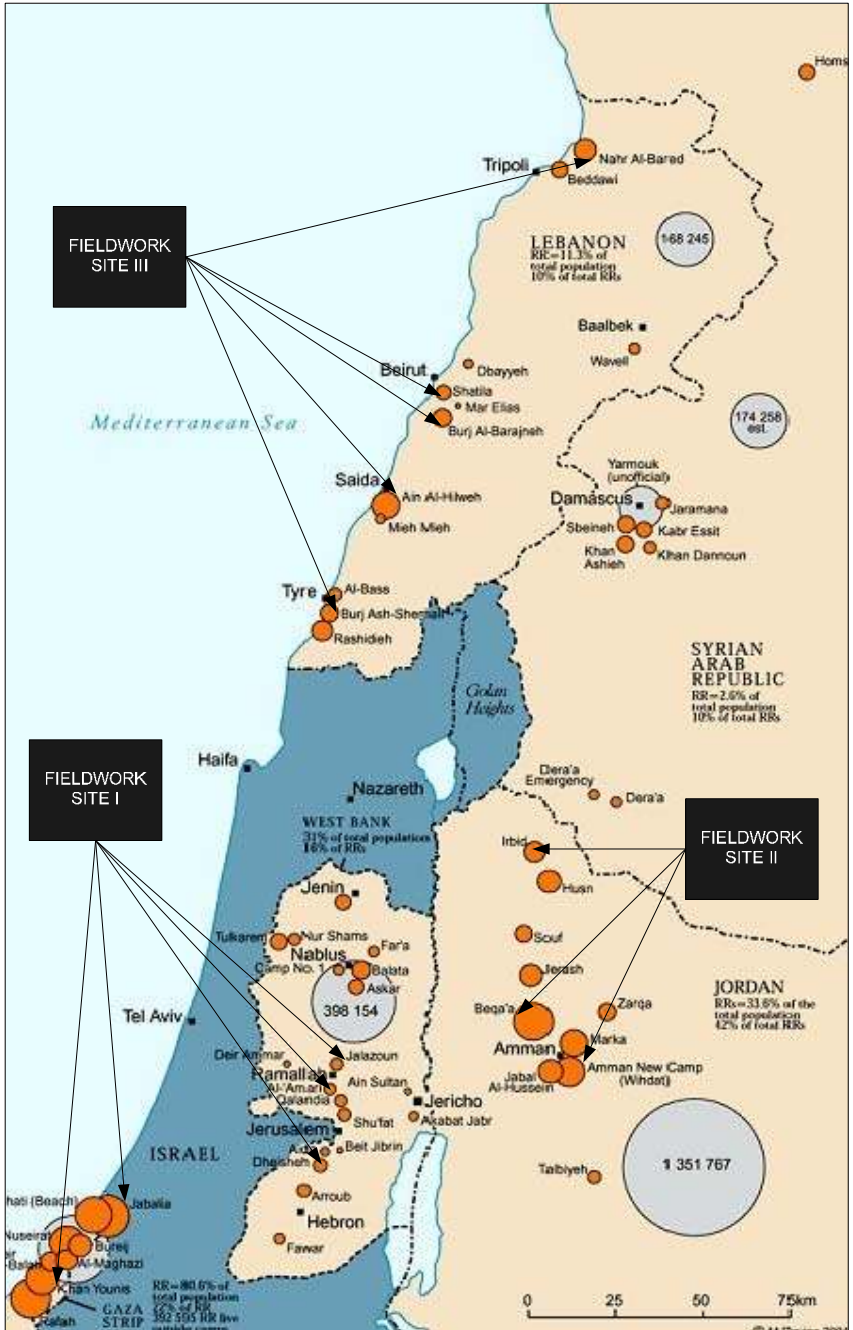
There are not only differences between countries in the diaspora, but also within one country the setting can differ considerably as explaine: all this impacts ICT access and use. The geographic separation and social fragmentations are manifested on several levels: Palestine/diaspora; camp/non-camp; central/remote settings. The distance between the (capital) cities and the camps strengthens the different forms of segregation and the sense of isolation. For example, al-Bekaa camp in the North-East of Jordan or Nahr al-Bared camp in the North of Lebanon are quite isolated; often directly by way of military checkpoints.[10] It is easier to be part of a city's social/political life when a camp is located in the capital, especially when expanding working class suburbs have incorporated the camps, as in Beirut and Amman. I could visit the camps in Beirut or Amman while also planning others things the same day, but a visit to Bourj al-Shamali in the South or Nahr al-Bared in the North of Lebanon was a different undertaking. I had to take a taxi journey from the nearby city (Tripoli or Sour, respectively), via separate roads that at times included military posts. These everyday realities on top of the political developments since I embarked on the research in 2001, determined my objectives.

Rethinking the objectives

The research objective was to examine different types of imagined Palestinian communities and explore how they are reconstructed by internet usage. The personal and ethnographic experiences sketched above helped me to *fine-tune* the general objective into the following aims: (1) examine the role of the internet in creating transnational links and images of Palestinian communities, and (2) investigate how the internet is used to mobilize local and transnational (pro) Palestinian activism. I start from the idea that the internet is a mediating space through which the Palestinian nation is globally "imagined" and shaped. This 'global Palestine' is a platform that gathers people of different local and diasporic Palestinian entities. Communities that were traditionally separated by national boundaries and/or travel restrictions, now exhibit new modes of connection via internet interactions.

The processes that produce such virtual Palestinian communities are not merely online-based but lie at the complex intersection between capitalism, technological development, politics of representation, and modes of governmentality. In fact, not only does internet use strengthen and reconfigure internal Palestinian communications, it also reconstructs its relation to global audiences. The internet may therefore affect Palestinian national self-identities and the ways these identities are related to/shaped by transnational forces. Moreover, I came to learn that internet usage do not only generate local/grassroots political participation, but also generate regional and transnational activism and mobilization.

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[10] Al-Bekaa camp was once literally locked/closed off during protests in support of the Intifada.

Though I take the internet as a vantage point, I wonder in what ways the social/political desires of Palestinians shape internet development. As indicated in figure 2, the different areas central in this research are not one-sided but complexly interrelated. Technological developments are crucial, but they do not determine the impact of internet usage in the research areas. The internet is clearly deployed as a political instrument, making cyberspace part of a political space that is shaped by both local and global forces. Political contexts and practices on the ground—violence, peace process, closures/isolation, and other regional developments—influence the use of internet communication as well as technological developments. Unveiling these local and global forces requires an understanding of the underlying political-economic issues, especially where they relate to offline Palestinian experiences.

The way I reformulated the general research objective had everything to do with being faced with certain contradictions between euphoric expectations and everyday contestations.

Figure 2: Schematic diagram of the dialectic relations involved in the research
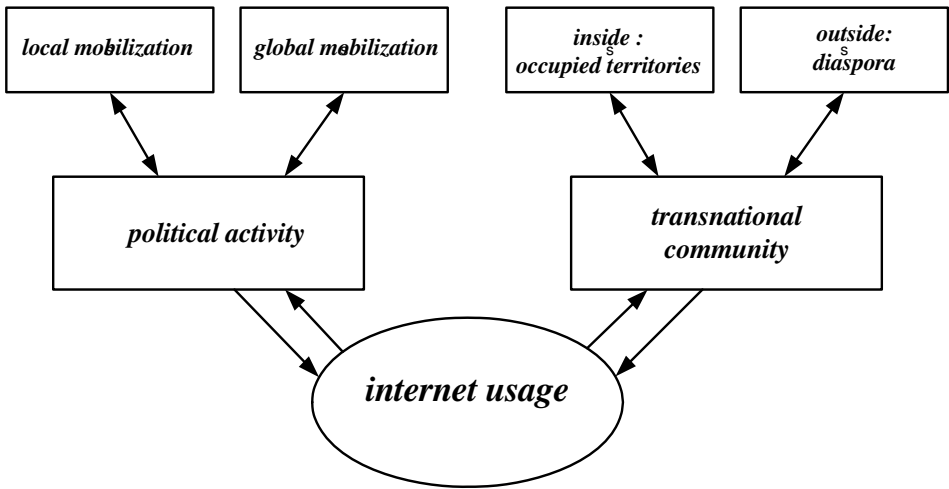
Discovering contradictions

By starting to unravel the offline and online relations in the different fieldwork sites I became aware of the limits and potentials of internet technology. Locating the research questions into their historical and political-economic contexts indicated several *contradictions* and research *tensions* (Figure 3). The *first* issue concerns the overrated idea of *mobility,* as the returning myth of globalisation. The world is in constant movement because of migration processes and free flow capitalism: hence the supposed increase of mobility in a transnational world. Many fieldwork examples showed something different or even countered this notion. The context of the

Palestinian diaspora, points to *immobility,* at best *forced* mobility. Narratives of exile, deportations and occupation in the coming chapters express these contradictions. When facing serious problems crossing the borders from Jordan to Palestine, after being denied entry to Palestine and later deported, I understood much better that the concept of mobility is disbuted. The sense of isolation due to curfew and closures is also characteristic of this immobility. During discussions in Palestine and Lebanon I came across many examples of the exile and immobility people were confronted with. During an interview in 2002, Samar, from Shatila camp in Beirut expressed what I heard so often:

> People want to, but don't believe they can go back to Palestine. But we should believe it, because if you cut the hope of returning to Palestine you are nobody: a person without a homeland is like a person without any roots.

The internet did help to bridge distances and overcome a sense of isolation. 23-year-old student Zen from Bethlehem Palestine was one of the lucky few that had internet connection at home at a time when it was most needed. During an interview in Ramallah in 2001 she gave the following explanation:

> The first two weeks of the Intifada I used to chat extensively. It was very difficult to go to work because they shot people at the checkpoint; I was scared to go out […] The meaning of place and time changed a lot, I am from Bethlehem which is not far from Ramallah. I use to visit my family every weekend. Now if I want to know how they are or need to assure them I'm ok, I send them an email. When they attacked and reoccupied Bethlehem, I checked many websites and news sources on the net for information and pictures.

Secondly, the concept of a new alternative/virtual space strengthens, rather than replaces, the strong ideal of an independent territorial state. The virtual traversals to-and-from offline Palestinian cities and villages are often about being in *space* in search for a *place*. This apparent tension between space and place was very concrete in the diaspora because most Palestinians are exiled/refugees and thus never seen their homeland. Nevertheless, Palestinian territorial reference is a major part of everyday social and political life and is commonly referred to. 16-year-old Shaker from Beirut tried to explain the strong urge he felt to be connected to the land and the people of Palestine during an interview in 2003:

> When you're cold you need gloves and when you're sick medicine, but meeting a Palestinian from Palestine is like meeting your other half, the missing piece of the puzzle.

The relation between offline and online reality is very important. Face-to-face contact becomes a fantasy for those who can only have virtual communication as an alternative. Mere virtual connection with Palestine as an alternative also has a

downside. Dali, from Shatila camp in Lebanon explained during an interview in 2003 how isolation and immobility re-constitute the relevance of place and space:

> You feel like drifting away as if no one is around you in the internet café. The only aim is to talk with him [Dali's internet friend in Palestine]. But I want to see him, I feel something is missing. I shouldn't make the mistake of talking about love, but just politics and Palestine because it is impossible to meet anyway. It's hard.

Closely related to the harsh realities of immobility and isolation/exile and the reinterpretation of space and place, is the *third* issue: *oppression*. This is a forceful thread in the Palestinian experience. The collapse of the Palestinian economy and infrastructure, casualties and a society with thousands disabled/traumatised, and the hardships that the neglected refugees in host countries have to endure, are all 'in-your-face' realities. But besides the victimization, the military assaults, and the media bias, there is also *resistance*. Palestinian agency occurs at different tactical/strategic levels: in internet cafés where kids play Intifada games or where youths assemble to debate with Israelis on chat forums, and by hacktivists who damage or infiltrate pro- Israeli websites; and also *indirectly* by making local or global websites to notify the world, express the historical Palestinian narrative, and humanise the Palestinian people, or, international political mobilization and support.

The *Electronic Intifada* website illustrates these three themes. Pro-Palestinian activists from different countries joined efforts and started an electronic uprising. They launched a web-based movement aimed at countering the media propaganda, uncovering pro-Israeli reporting that many journalists were getting away with. The term *Intifada* is related to a form of *resistance*. The content and personal features also emphasize the oppression of Palestinians. One of the website's major aims is mobilizing the international community to support the right of (*territorial*) Palestinian self-determination while *virtually* bringing together Palestinians and non-Palestinians. By doing so, it offered alternative mobility and space for people who are not capable of engaging in direct activism or lack of offline *mobility*. These three tensions—mobility/immobility, space/place, and oppression/resistance—-are the concrete prisms through which to understand the research questions.

Figure 3: "Tensions" during research

Contradictions of The Field

| CONTRADICTION I *Mobility & Immobility* | CONTRADICTION II *Virtual Space & Territorial Place* | CONTRADICTION III *Oppression & Resistance* |
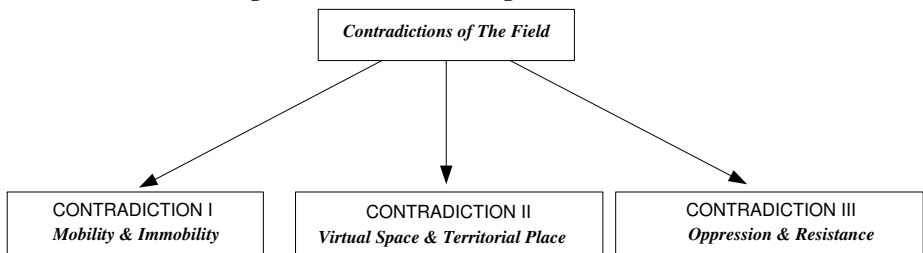
One of the challenges of multi-sited research is to understand the local (historic) differences. History is written from a contemporary perspective as well as from different localities in the present; history forms a crucial backdrop to this research.The aim is then to trace "how and why media messages go awry and yet also how they shape lives, treating audiences neither as resistant heroes to be celebrated, nor as stupid victims to be pitied" (Ginsburg, Abu Lughod, Larkin 2002:13). These three tensions are in fact the markers of a particular local (colonial/political) history.

1.2 Narratives of Discontent

The establishment of Apartheid in South Africa in 1948, the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, and the occupation of Palestine in 1948, illustrate a post WWII momentum when territorial fragmentation was a central part of colonial rule. The geographic partitions in the context of imperial wars involved new articulations of nation and community and redefined the relationship between national identity, the (colonial) nation state, and a shared collective narrative.

Palestine can be described as a nation without a state. The Palestinian tragedy has been a transnational one involving diverse populations and states. Self and group identity can be based on people's lives as victims of oppression and, of course, experiences during resistance. It is important to understand the history of the Palestinian people in order to understand the concept of a shared (political) identity. Even though it was prohibited to express Palestinian identity in whatever form, be it local or national, manifest or latent, such claims to a national identity did not disappear; to the contrary. Rather, it was preserved and politicized, particularly in the refugee camps and occupied cities.

One of the clearest illustrations of the indomitable claims of identity are the incessant references to belonging to a certain village or house, even though it might have been destroyed or long taken over by Israeli families. Fourth generation refugee camp children still perceive themselves as being from Jaffa or Deir-Yassin, making the local attachments (fuelled by virtual sentiments on the internet) very apparent. In order to understand the relevance of the internet as a social-political alternative, it is necessary to study the wider Palestinian context while pointing out the historical roots of 1948 and 1967. To know the needs of the present, we must understand the losses of the past.

In defence of history

The making of the Israeli state was based on a Zionist nationalist ideology in which land and labour had to be 'Jewish only'. Ella Shohat (1989) showed how this meant the overall exclusion of Palestinians from land, employment, and politics. In 1897, Theodor Herzl adopted Zangwill's famous dictum; "The problem of Zionism is one of means of transport: there is a people without a land and a land without a people".

Such exclusionary views were repeated over and again until they became common in Israeli (and much of Western) society. A century later such notions were again repeated, for example by then Prime Minister of Israel Golda Meir, who stated in a *Sunday Times* interview on June 15, 1969: "There were no such thing as Palestinians. When were there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian state? It was either southern Syria before the First World War, and then it was a Palestine including Jordan. It was not as though there were a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist".[11]

Therefore, according to Edward Said, Zionism is crucial for comprehending the current human and political crises. In *The Politics of Dispossession* he wrote:

> In my opinion, the question of Zionism is the touchstone of contemporary political judgement. A lot of people who are happy to attack Apartheid or U.S. intervention in Central America are not prepared to talk about Zionism and what it has done to the Palestinians. To be the victim of a victim does present quite unusual difficulties. For if you are trying to deal with the classic victim of all time—the Jews and his or her movement—then to portray yourself as the victim of the Jew is a comedy worthy of one of your own novels. But now there is a new dimension, as we can see from the spate of books and articles in which any kind of criticism of Israel is treated as an umbrella for anti-Semitism. Particularly in the United States, if you say anything at all, as an Arab from a Muslim culture, you are seen to be joining classical European or Western anti-Semitism. It has become absolutely necessary, therefore, to concentrate on the particular history and context of Zionism in discussing what it represents for the Palestinians (1994:121).

What was known as the country 'Palestine' and its people, the 'Palestinians', began being transformed permanently during the first decades of the 20th Century. World War I, the Zionist movement, and the politics of the British Mandate had drastic consequences for Palestinians. Until WWI, Palestine belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, Bolsheviks exposed documents on the Sykes-Picot (1916) agreement made between France and Britain for the division of Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. The Balfour Declaration in 1917 was Britain's first open support of the Zionist movement in Palestine. Between 1917 and 1947 land purchase and Zionist migration into Palestine grew, while Arab Palestinian forces weakened. This succession of events caused major changes in the self-consciousness of the Palestinians (Khalidi 1997:159).

After the British colonial army crushed the Palestinian uprising of 1936, the British Peel Commission of 1937 suggested partitioning Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state while retaining a British Mandate area. Accepted by the Zionists, the Palestinians rejected this and more revolts broke out (Takkenberg 1998:9). This

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[11] For a history of Zionist politics as represented by Herzl and Meir see: Nur Masalha (1992), Ilan Pappe (1992), John Rose (2004).

scheme was later followed by the more sophisticated United Nations Resolution 181 plan in 1947, which in fact violated other UN principles that granted people the right to self-determination. This UN partition plan of 1947 led to al-*Nakba,* or the Catastrophe (the commonly used term for the events of 1948). The plan granted the Jews in Palestine over 56% sovereignty of the territory at a time when they owned less than 7% of the land and constituted less than one-third of the population. By the end of the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, Israel appropriated 77.8% of the land. Contemporary discussions about peace deals do not mention that Palestinians had already compromised profoundly when they were forced to accept Israel on 78% of Palestine that was subsequently lost through war, occupation, and exile.

Palestine was fragmented and became largely a country of displaced refugees. The question of why the large majority of the Palestinian population fled from their villages in 1948 is still debated. In the 1980s and 1990s several Israeli historians 'rewrote' this history from an unusually critical perspective. The primary causes were armed attacks on Palestinian villages, lack of united Arab leadership, and weak military capacity compared to the British-backed Zionist armed forces (see Morris 1987[12], Ilan Pappé 1988, 2006, Avi Shlaim 1988). The Zionist movement, and later the state of Israel, forced upon Palestine a *double migration:* firstly, through a massive displacement beyond their territory and secondly, through the arrival of large groups of settlers to replace the Palestinians (Safieh 1997:6). In 1967, after Egypt suffered a militarily defeat, Israel occupied the remaining Gaza (under control of Egypt), West Bank, and East Jerusalem (under control of Jordan). Now, 60 and 40 years later by the start of the 21st century, three million Palestinians live in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, more than one million Palestinians live within the (pre-1948) borders of Israel, and a majority of the remaining four and a half million exiled Palestinians are scattered around refugee camps throughout the Arab world. The vast majority of Palestinians cannot return to Palestine.

Palestinian life inside the territories is determined by occupation. While Kimmerling (1993) described Israeli policies towards Palestinians as one of the 'stick' and the 'carrot',[13] occupation took increasingly violent forms from the early 1980s on. Military rule in the 1980s branded a stick far more than a carrot. In 1985 the *Iron Fist* policy was introduced by then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, with the aim to break down any national aspiration or opposition. This was to be achieved by any means necessary, such as the 'bone breaking' methods by the First Intifada.[14] But by then the Palestinian grassroots movement was already changing. Teachers, workers unions, women's movements, and student unions, self-governing community projects, and a variety of political parties had become rooted in society. In his discussion of the

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[12] Especially Morris' 'The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem', chronicled for the first time in detail the terror and ethnic cleansing that drove 600,000-750,000 Palestinians from their homes in 1948, thus refuting the myth that they fled under the orders of Arab leaders.

[13] I.e.: to punish or seduce into submission: different tactics for the same aim.

[14] Perhaps the first televised example of Israeli oppression: young men were dragged to hills where soldiers used stones and rifles to break arms and legs.

history of Palestinian revolts, Hiltermann (1992) describes the important role of the strong social structure for the formation of local organization of later broad-based resistance.

From the 1970s on, West-Bankers and Gazans began to demonstrate in solidarity with Palestinians inside the 1948 borders ('Israeli Arabs'). Palestinians adopted the common hymn *Biladi, Biladi* [my country, my country] and literature of resistance flourished (Kimmerling 1993:254). The new universities played an important role in this regard; particularly at Birzeit University where the left-nationalist student councils went deep into anti-colonial activities. Students worked to bridge the division between rural and urban Palestinians and prevented Israeli efforts to purchase land from farmers (Kimmerling 1993:255). The expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982 relocated the political centre from Beirut to the Occupied Territories, which strengthened political consciousness. December 9, 1987 was a major turning point in Palestinian history: the outbreak of the Intifada. For many around the world the Intifada was an eye-opener about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. For the first time Palestinian perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict received some hearing in Western public opinion, and Palestinians could be viewed as an oppressed people.

Due to the collapse of the Soviet Block and the first US war against Iraq in 1991, Palestinians were forced into negotiations and agreements. The meetings of 1991 in Madrid and the official PLO/Israel/US-brokered Oslo negotiations were to present a solution for the Middle East conflict. Prior to 1994, Palestinians had no form of sovereignty. The Palestinian territories were colonized and the existing Palestinian political leadership could only operate on a symbolic or very local level. The political-economic circumstances steadily deteriorated. The peace process created false promises and (like the popular protests) was portrayed in equally false ways.

False Promises—False Portrayals

The period between the first and second Intifada is important and should be seen in light of the transformation of the PLO. Hassan (2003) describes the years between 1982 (expulsion from Lebanon) and 1993 (start of Oslo/PNA) as the period when the PLO abandoned the politics of resistance linked to struggle for national liberation, and embraced the 'politics of appeasement'. The major problem is that this shift was predominantly defined by US interests (Hassan 2003:1). Later, in exchange for Israel's strategic control of all Palestinian territory (albeit under a Palestinian flag) and complete denial of the right of return for refugees, Barak's government pulled President Arafat into a full and final settlement. According to Perry Anderson, Oslo did not change anything significant:

> After eight years, the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) remains in complete control of 60% of the West Bank, and 'joint' control of another 27%; a network of Israeli-only roads built on confiscated land divides and encircles the residual enclaves under Palestinian authority; the number of

Jewish settlers, who monopolise 80% of all water in the occupied territories, has virtually doubled; the per capita income of Palestinians fell by one quarter in the first five years after the Accords (2001c:18).

Offering Arafat partial and symbolic independence meant abandoning any pretence of a return to the pre-1967 borders.[15] In a context of popular opposition to such 'surrender', Arafat was trapped. Taking the conditions in account, the eruption of a popular uprising was hardly surprising anymore. Two months later Sharon made a provocative visit to the holy Harm Sharif (part of the al-Aqsa Mosque) in Jerusalem. The illusions of a 'just peace' in the context of Oslo had vanished and Palestinians did not accept the dictates or provocations (Anderson 2001c:19). A new generation stepped in and mobilized active resistance. On 29 September 2000, on the day of Sharon's trip, the Intifada exploded for the second time. However, this Intifada took shape in a radically different context, that of a post-Cold War, post-Oslo, and soon enough post-9/11 Middle East. It therefore soon met with a response that was bloodier than ever.

The situation also caused bitterness and despair. For example, studying or working abroad was a common aspiration for Arab youth but with 9/11 this was nearly impossible. In Palestine feelings of desperation were being challenged by the continued mobilization of the Intifada. The different forms of resistance comprised of Fatah factions, Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and Non Governmental Organisations (NGO), secular Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)/Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) factions, as wells as Islamist Hamas and Jihad, and even international activists like that of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM).

Young stone throwers at the clashes mostly hailed from poor classes and refugee camps; militant groups were mainly formed around the youth movements of political parties. The Intifada also spread outside Palestine when protests occurred in Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, but also in the US and Europe where it merged with a growing antiwar movement after 9/11. Edward Said succinctly captured the shift in political activism:

> A turning point in the Arab history has been reached and for this the Intifada is a significant marker. For not only is it an anti colonial rebellion of the kinds that we have seen periodically in Setif, Sharpville, Soweto and elsewhere, it is another example of the general discontent with the post Cold War order displayed in events of Seattle and Prague (2001:30).[16]

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[15] This stems from the Sharm Al Sheik (Egypt) US-Israel-PNA meeting of 2000, which was followed by the Why River Washington meeting. Using the word 'generous'—and revering to '90% of the land, is misleading because it actually means 90% of the 22% of historic Palestine (West Bank and Gaza), itself divided by Israeli By-pass roads or settlements; in other words a non-viable Bantu state.

[16] The 'Seattle protest' is considered the birth of the new anti capitalist movement where thousands demonstrated against the WTO meeting in November 1999. Prague 2000 was the first international follow up where 25.000 people from Europe demonstrated against the IMF and WB.

While there are a number of similarities, there are also differences between the First and Second Intifada. In 1987 Palestinians introduced the Intifada as a new style of rebellion combining the character of a non-violent movement with that of a national struggle for independence. Many people were involved in one way or another in resistance through *civil disobedience*. Popular committees challenged the Israeli colonial administration and underground school systems and medical teams were set-up, Israeli products were boycotted, and there were many cases of tax rebellions and strikes (Hiltermann 1992). Ruthless oppression, which included killing, torture, and prolonged detention, and the broader impact of the first Gulf War in 1991, weakened the morale of the uprising. Later, top down centralization of the PLO, and the eventual malfunctioning of the PA administration itself, also limited the chance to combine official negotiations with continued resistance from below (Andoni 2001).

The return of the PLO leadership to Palestine after Oslo had significant consequences for grassroots structures and participation. During the First Intifada, grassroots resistance was organized with more or less direct (albeit underground) participation. But the Oslo interim agreement created a different environment for the second Intifada in 2000. The fact that the PA had partial control over some territorial areas complicated matters significantly; especially their monopoly of armed forces creating on-the-ground divisions. The militarization of society through armed groups and militants not only stalled a mass movement, it also allowed Israel to use its full military arsenal because the presence of the PNA and armed security forces allowed Israel to portray the conflict as a war between 'states'. The consequences were incomparable to even the most violent reactions to earlier uprisings. The use of F16 jets, bombardments and tank attacks on towns and cities worsened the type of injuries and total casualty tolls.

During fieldwork in Palestine many activists complained about the official media portrayal of the Intifada, underlying another clear difference between the First and the Second Intifada. However, a crucial/positive, difference with the first Intifada was the development of mass electronic media. This is significant because the focus of protest *is* often the media. A shift in coverage of Palestinians allowed for the Palestinian cause to gain more legitimacy. A concurrent shift in a more critical coverage of Israel's actions opened up a space for previously unthinkable criticism of Israeli policies.

Criticism from inside Israel started to gain strength too; Israeli journalists like Amira Hass, Gideon Levy, and Dan Rabinowitz wrote about the deliberate political agenda behind Sharon's visit to the al-Aqsa Mosque in 2000 that sparked off the Intifada, the deadly realities at checkpoints or the consequences of the wall, and so forth. However, views of critical journalists like Hass or Levy who are known in Israel are rarely explored in mainstream European media.[17] Moreover, a large number of

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[17] They are, however, invited to talk at conferences and debates, mostly attended by a selective audience. In fact, when living in Palestine the public debate on Israel seemed more 'open' than in many European press forms. The taboo on criticizing Israel was confirmed in a documentary that unveiled how high profile

mostly, but not exclusively, Arab journalists have been obstructed, injured, or killed. Reports on attacks against the press in Palestine piled up since the beginning of the Intifada because those who seek an inside view must be present at the literal centre of the conflict.

IDF forces have attacked numerous reporters and technicians as documented by Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (Al Mezan) and the International Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).[18] Even when wearing special vests and other signs of identification, Israeli soldiers systematically prevent their movement, destroy their devices and instruments, and even open fire. Many independent or Arab journalists have had their press offices closed and permits withdrawn. Comparative research listed Israel as one of the top countries that do not provide objective journalism.[19] In other words, a *war* over representation is waged often literally, which, according to many Palestinian NGOs, is a deliberate attempt to hide crimes against Palestinians.

These realities in Palestine showed me the shortcomings of the "free" press, liberal public sphere, and other ideals that presuppose there is open access to public discourse and free mobility. The on-the-ground realities and experiences of curfew/closure/immobility determined the focus of the research. It became more important to understand the effects of new internet technologies on Palestinian diasporas, and internet communication as expressed in political contexts. In order to link *theory* about ICT, globalization, and mass media, with *practices* of occupation, exile, and capitalism, I will briefly discuss the major theoretical frameworks underlying the research questions.

1.3 Theory *and* Practice

The development of the internet has altered communication styles and information/media structures, while the rise of global capitalism and global communication continues to impact our world (Featherstone 1995, Kellner 1998). According to Castells, the *network society* emerged from this transformation of global economy and culture. The transformative potential of the internet (also central in descriptions of political-economic changes) were a common feature of the globalization discourse; though utopian idealisation about the *magic* of "globalization"

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politicians and journalists were systematically targeted by right wing and pro-Israeli organizations such as CIDI in Holland (see Zwijgen over Israel, by Zembla 2003).

[18] For attacks on journalists in the Occupied Territories since 2000, see CPJ report at: http://www.cpj.org/regions_00/mideast_00/mideast_00.html; Information for 2001-2006 and more on general press developments can be found at www.cpj.org/regions_07/mideast_07/mideast_07.html#top.

[19] http://www.mezan.org/. And see CPJ general statistics about democratic state of journalism in Palestine/Israel. This practice is against the international law and UN resolution that "guarantees the protection of journalists delegated to perform risky missions". A large number of mostly but not exclusively Arab journalists have been killed or injured. According to the 4th Geneva Convention this is considered a war crime. See also Kay Hafez who describes that Israel applies censorship "for the sake of nationalist goals" (2001:6).

were often out of touch from reality. For Fukuyama (1992) and Friedman (1999), globalization marked the triumph of capitalism and market economy. Huntington (1996) was inclined to stress the definite 'clash of civilization' between the civil West and the uncivil rest. This *magic* of "globalization" actually arose out of another/preceding idiom: the magic of "postmodernism". Both magical models were major (theoretical) promoters of ICT.

Globalization and the role of "new technologies" became new kinds of postmodern articulations. A stream of thinking, specifically from cultural sciences, by which according to Eagleton (2004) postmodern theorists:

> … reject totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence, and the possibility of objective knowledge. Postmodernity is sceptical of truth, unity and progress, opposes what it sees as elitism in culture, tends towards cultural relativism, and celebrates pluralism, discontinuity and heterogeneity (:13).

This transition is marked by an implosion of technologies that supposedly even created a *post-human* species, or replaced political economy (Kellner 2002:287). Baudrillard argued that information technologies entered every aspect of society and created a social environment that is 'simulated'.

To avoid overtly pessimistic or optimistic—and usually abstract metaphysical—narratives, Kellner (2002) argued for understanding globalization as a product of technological revolution and global restructuring of capitalism. A political economy of 'new' mass media and its value as commodity of social capital belies the internet and new public spheres. The internet may emphasize the interrelationship between society and an 'effective' (i.e. critical) public sphere. The important question becomes *how* access to the internet can impact society, or more precisely, how the internet transforms the global Palestinian public sphere. What is sometimes lacking is a conceptual understanding that integrates complex/diverse phenomena.

New technology (and 'new' economy) are part of a global restructuring of capitalism, but they are not autonomous forces that themselves generate a new society or economy distinct from previous modes of social organisation (Kellner 2002:289).[20] Implementing Kellner's message demands a critical assessment of the development of electronic media in general. The next section will be an assessment of some of these notions by tracing the evolution of electronic media. My aim is to understand the progressive as well as oppressive characteristics of globalization of media and how national/collective identity and belonging in traditional media overlap/differ from internet media.

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[20] Kellner argued that Capitalism persists to be the hegemonic force; and that this is not less, but more so since the postmodern 'end of history' paradigm. Unrestrained capitalism continues to dominate production, distribution, and consumption.

Tracing the electronic revolution

> What possible relationship could exist between this shrinking, splitting, and boxing of end-credits on the one end, and mass revolts against the imposition of International Monetary Fund policies in a modern metropolitan capital such as Argentina's Buenos Aires? How could it be that this shrinking, splitting and boxing is related in any way whatsoever to the West dropping bombs on this or that part of the developing world? … Could there be a connection between such a marginal aspect of our experience in the media and the structures of the media themselves? And is there anything linking all this to the forms and content of the media and the meanings they generate? Perhaps … you are aware that the world is not quite right, but the reasons for why it is wrong do not disclose themselves in how the world appears (Wayne 2003:1).

If media has emancipating potentials we need to discover how and to what extent. The important questions Wayne (2003) poses in the opening quote challenges us to link media and politics in such a way as to understand contemporary media cultures from a political-economic context. Critical analyses of media technology are not new; they can be traced to the debates inspired by the Frankfurt School in the 1940s and Cultural Studies in the 1960/70s in Britain. Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and contributions in Feminist and Postcolonial studies were influenced by Marxist analyses.[21] The internet has a special place in the development of the 'electronic revolution'. Understanding how the internet potentially represents/transforms the Palestinian public sphere also means connecting the history of media to frameworks of (national) community.

Instead of referring to 'the' media, it was also required to deconstruct different media forms. Marshall McLuhan's groundbreaking work in the 1960s has broadly influenced our thinking about media. McLuhan introduced the 'hot and cold' media dichotomy which helps explain the reconstitution and transformation of media (1994). '*Hot*' media have low participation but high information content, while '*cool*' media is high in participation but contains a lower level of information intensity. Examples include telephone vs. print media or cinema vs. television. These reconstitutions implicate the meaning of place, space and time. Media thus also impacts the public sphere and (national) community, and this juxtaposition has been debated incessantly.

According to Habermas, the critical public sphere declined as electronic media became a dominant field of consumption and promoted media capitalism/competition rather than information and debate. Unlike the *hot* medium of face-to-face communication in the idealised coffee house salons, the development of new, *cold,* media such as newspapers, TV or radio, disallowed the possibility of talking

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[21] Marxism had offered a framework of media with regards to unequal social relations. These dynamics result in the formation of ideological representations of society; ownership, content and media production are linked and shaped by class domination. A good overview can be found in Stevenson (1995) and see also the work of Colin Sparks (2006 and 2007).

back and taking part. Through specific communication practices, people were turned into (and regarded as) a *receiving* public. This process, in time, transformed communication relations from collectivism to individuality. The *public* became more privatized, and the *private* more commercialized. The new economic/political contexts therefore transformed interactions between the public and the private. The way 'hot media'—more direct and face-to-face transformed to 'cool media'—with more space to participate, is related to broader *Modernising changes*. Stevenson argued, "The transition to electronic communication can be connected with a change in the experiential nature of modernity" (1995:119).

The link between media and national identity has been placed centrally in one of the standard texts related to nation-state/nationalism. In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson (1983) describes the 'imagined' characteristic—members of a nation will never know all the members yet do feel connected to them. The nation is also characterized by "sovereignty" and "limitedness". These attributes of the nation are important because they refer to it as having territorial yet elastic boundaries dividing it from other nations, and involving self-determination because "nations dream of being free" (Anderson 1983:6). Shared symbols, images, narratives, and language circulates beyond face-to-face interaction. Through this process the role of mass media and communication gained importance in constituting a sense of national community. These same tools strengthened the nation-state. Its rise was unthinkable without top-down media, centralised technological infrastructures, homogenizing national newspapers, national broadcasting corporations, and so on. Nations and nation-states should, in other words, be considered *ideologically constructed*.

In their early writings Habermas and Anderson had the 'traditional' media technologies as their available examples. The technological developments of media infrastructures created more space to participate. The internet contributed to 'widening' this public and private sphere. A qualitative difference between internet and other media forms are the participative elements provided to its consumers/users. Watching television or reading a newspaper comprises a single activity, while internet technologies can embrace a variety of participatory elements. Later, Anderson (1991, 2001a) also placed television and the internet as the powerful influence of print media.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the internet started to undermine state monopoly on media. The further globalizing economy and the fast developments of technological media, influenced the ways people exchange and express their ideas. The internet is comprised of different levels: one can read, write, watch pictures, listen to music and live radio programs, voice chat with one another, use a camcorder while chatting to see each other, download films, and archive material, etc. The internet is like a *basket* containing newspapers, radio, and television, except that all these, on their own, miss the potentially interactive and grassroots features of internet based media. According to Castells (1996) citizens became attached to a 'mediate global' public sphere as we see greater diversifications. Castells' influential *Information Age* trilogy (1996, 1997, 1998) and *The Internet Galaxy* (2001), suggest that a *network society* relies on an interface between the global and the local (the virtual *space of flows* and the territorial

space of places). New mass media thus plays a crucial role in the re-imagination and re-constitution of links between people, and in the emergence of (new) public arenas of debate.

One of the theoretical critiques regarding the imagined community was that the nation-state no longer features as the privileged space for the imagination of identity. Appadurai (1997) outlined the changing transformation from national communities to 'communities of sentiments' assuming a new process of 'de-territorialization'. One of the buzzwords became *transnationalism* as I will debate in Chapter Two. Anderson (1992) argued that distance and exile are still powerful incubators of identity and, moreover, that better communication strengthens awareness of others in distance places, and therefore affecting self-identity. Rather than transnationalism, the result of new forms of communication is thus long-distance nationalism, a kind of trans/nation-state/nationalism.[22]

Cultural and technological globalization also impacted the notions of public space and public sphere. Thus another, yet related, critique regarded the public sphere concept and was much debated (Calhoun 1992). One of the effects of new electronic media is the expansion of the public sphere with opportunities for participation by a public with transnational ties, creating space for new interpretations/interpreters. The internet relates differently to social, political, and economic power structures in comparison to television. In much of the academic discourse about a 'transcendental cyber space'*,* the internet is to some extent treated as an autonomous (cyber)space. The transformation from a territorial to a virtual/network society supposedly led to the disappearance of the nation-state as an important political-economic framework.

A central argument of Castells with regard to this discussion is that a new form of capitalism has emerged: global in its character, hardened in its goals, and much more flexible than any of its predecessors. The network society makes explicit the dynamics by which the global elite has dominated the lives of those who remain banned to the local. This reinforces a structural domination of the 'space of flows' (online) over the 'space of places' (offline). New social movements have sought to resist the expansion of the ruling classes. By using new media forms, political groups developed alternative voices through free sources of the internet. The most quoted examples were the Zapatistas' use of the internet in their struggle against the oppression of indigenous Indians by the Mexican state. While understanding the described transformation of the capitalist system, the influence of the online over the offline is doubted. That is why the Zapatista example remains an interesting allegory—they were not internet activists but guerrillas who used the internet in addition to their predominantly offline resistance.

As mentioned above, postmodern/globalization analyses about the impact of new media remained too much on the level of philosophy and contribute to a metaphysical narrative that rarely articulates concretely how political power and

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[22]Although Anderson correctly critiques the interpretation of transnationalism as a concept that should oppose the notion of nationalism, in my view the notion of *long distance* by Anderson and that of *transnationalism* share more similarities than differences.

capitalism shape internet development and society. Thus, however fascinating some of the narratives, the alternative space-less world cannot be devoid of any link to locality. As Terranova (2004) shows, rather than disconnected from a particular place, to have virtual reality we need more connection and for this we still need a grounded 'real' infrastructure as this relation itself holds important implications. Moreover, Palestinians strongly identify as part of a national community. The internet can shape the formation of national identities and public spheres in a similar fashion as the electronic communication and 'print capitalism' we know from Anderson and Habermas.

We also need to look at different social-political histories of mass media, and the relation between politics, media, and society. This is especially important in the Arab world, where there have been profound changes with the new programs via MBC and AL Jazeera since the 1990s introduction of Satellite television. Together with the beginning of internet technology, this has generated social changes in local and transnational media spaces. The level and type of participation and availability differs according to country and class.

The 1990s neo-liberal free-market policies led to an increase of Satellite and internet projects. Although aiming towards commercialization of the medium in general, these new infrastructures were important in circumventing centralised and censored state media; particularly as the Middle East is one of the most state-controlled regions. Progressive online newspapers are an example of the re-constructions of identity and mobilizations on/via the internet in the Middle East.[23] While most internet users in the early phase of internet development in the Arab world belonged to the elite classes, this changed a great deal with the mushrooming Internet Cafes that offered low cost internet as I will show in Chapter Six. The internet penetration statistics in the Middle East show the highest growth rate in the world. According to the Internet World stats Report there was more than a 400% increase of internet access between 2000 and 2005. These are rough estimates because community access and shared usage is high, especially in Palestine, having had several important technological leaps as I will explain in Chapter Two.[24]

The early work on new media and the internet in the Middle Eastern context, offered by Alterman and Eickelman (1998), and Anderson (1999), had an important impact on understanding the relationship between media, political community, and public sphere. According to Eickelman & Salvatore (2003), the institutionalization of certain media contributes to specific ways of being a public, of coming together and creating collectivities". As Eickelman argues:

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[23] Simultaneously, however, the internet has increased the number of jailed journalists increased even more. One of the reports by CPJ (2006) shows that one in three jailed journalists worldwide is now an internet blogger. Egypt arrested and imprisoned several well-know critical bloggers that has led to international uproar. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6164798.stml or http://www.guardian.co.uk/egypt/story/0,,2019064,00.html and http://www.dailystaregypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=1456
[24] www.internetworldstats.com/me/reports.htm

> …in a repressive ' homeland', public sphere can also enter more readily into contact with their 'diaspora' counterparts, often living in circumstances less subject to political control and intimidation…the increased possibilities for transnational communication also contribute significantly to widening 'homeland' public spheres. Some ideas of public can be intensely local; others can be transregional and transnational.[25]

Looking back, Birzeit University was the embryo of Palestinian internet. At the time of my MA fieldwork in 1998/1999 student campaigners and volunteers at the Computer Centre prepared the *Birzeit Internet Festival* with the aim to enhance general internet skills through workshops about email usage and search engines. Several of my friends were also involved in a unique project that combined radio with internet technology. With *Outload* they offered programs and had discussions about local/internal issues, music, and interviews (see Table 1). The program could be listened to once a week via the BZU website from any place in the world.

By tracing the electronic revolution, especially with regards to the construction and imagination of national communities, Palestine showed the limitations of the liberal public sphere and transnational mobility. The idea that internet media is a completely different (better, freer) form of ICT than newspapers or television, exaggerates the differences while downplaying the structural forces that make up internet technology. It is too tempting to attribute a specific role to the internet and overstate the meaning of a virtual world, especially if viewed as some sort of substitute. These seem to be opposing statements, but in fact what is needed is a dialectic understanding that can make sense of contradicting phenomena.

When we discuss online identity and construction of communities, it is important to note that mass mediation online does not replace face-to-face communication. We cannot forget the importance of physical practices, and it is more helpful to look at media in *relation to* offline, face-to-face, forms of communication. Every fundamental change in the history of communication is part of a preceding and future process; according to Carey (2005:446), most of the initial internet literature was not sufficiently historical and lacked a comparative perspective with other forms of technology. Another important point is the fact that this 'space-less' technique ICT offers, is in the Palestinian case so obviously used for 'place' (territorial) related motives, in particular through the strong call for a Palestinian state on the internet.

Therefore, although it is sometimes stated that the nation-state is an outdated concept, this is hardly applied to the particular conditions of Palestinians. The internet's relation to everyday life cannot be understood without considering the broader political-economic dynamics. Concerning the impact of ICT developments, Dahhan (2003) writes, "Palestinian Israelis indeed find themselves between a rock and a hard place: discrimination within Israeli society towards them has been echoed in the framework of CMC (computer mediated communication) and ICTs."

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[25] In: Public Sphere and Muslim Identities. Paper presented at ASSR-ISIM conference, Amsterdam Netherlands. 'Media, Religion, and the Public Sphere, December 2001.

It is important to note that, contrary to the open *publicness* of communication, the introduction of the internet also enables users to operate *secretively* (from the state). But a form of *selectivity* can also be motivated by unequal computer literacy, (in)accessibility   or exclusion of web-domains, cultural preferences and conditions. The public sphere is an important notion, especially as numerous contributions offered new ways to move beyond the traditional public sphere. The idea of *counter public sphere/counter publics* (Klug 2000, Warner 2002, Fenton 2003) is important with regard to the Palestinian national context. Many of these assessments lead me to conclude that the impact of electronic/mass media is to be seen as a dialectic process.

Dialectics of Internet

> The political situation today is the major component of our internet use, "al-haja 'um al-ikhtira'" [need is the mother of invention]. When companies are not able to go from the West Bank to Gaza, all of sudden Video Conference becomes important; when people are stuck home on curfew, all of sudden your internet connection to the outside world is important. Sam Bahour, Ramallah.

During an interview in 2002 in Palestine, Sam Bahour explained the importance of the internet to me. He is one of the many Palestinian expatriates who returned after the Oslo agreements and participated in the founding of the first major Telecom provider in Palestine, The Palestine Telecommunications Company (PalTel). Paltel performed well in constructing a modern, high-performance infrastructure. This is even more impressive given the difficult circumstances in which PalTel has to operate, which included working under occupation and military attacks in the occupied PNA areas. I could see that the internet played an important role in Palestinian society. The number of internet connections in Palestine, but also in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan saw an exponential growth between 2001 and 2005. The development of the internet could "open" borders and even offer alternative ways to establish social relations.

There is no direct equilibrium between technological availability and open access, neither between the potential of virtual mobility and actual mobility. New analyses, such as of a de-territorializing world inspired by Castells and Appadurai, are best understood when they are studied in line with empirical experiences. No medium can completely transcend the economic gap widened by neo-liberal policies of the Washington consensus of the 1980/90s (Terranova 2004:41). The internet infrastructure itself exposes the power relation that lies beneath it. The strongly centralized governing bodies like the regulatory board (ICANN) that modify virtual space through URL/WWW name control, confirm this. These bodies resemble (electronic) real estate corporations that struggle and compete, and where legal disputes correspond to friction between electronic and local space (Terranova 2004:45). What is needed is a framework that integrates grassroots and critical means of resisting capitalist domination within the context of top-down electronic media production and the commercial public sphere. Mansell (2004) argues: "Insofar as

social and economic relations are not egalitarian within society today, there is a strong case for developing insights into the economy of new media" and calls for "revealing a much deeper understanding of the way in which articulations of power are shaping the new media landscape" (2004:97).

In the early stage of research many looked at online phenomena in isolation, understanding the internet in relation to what was happening online. For utopian analyses the internet was thought to be bringing a new "Enlightenment"; as Wellman (2004) noted, "They extolled the internet as egalitarian and globe spanning, and ignored the way in which difference in power and status might affect interactions both offline and online" (:124). But the hyper-euphoria about the ICT wonders of capitalism did not last long. "The flames of the dot.com boom dimmed early in 2000, and with it the internet came down to earth (125)." The internet is part of many other everyday communication tools, becoming *normalised*, albeit benefiting some groups more than others.

While *utopians* marvelled about online euphoria, *dystopian* analyses warned about the real life effects of virtual reality. However, it became clear that the internet may help/maintain offline relationships and a sense of community. In fact, Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002) showed that the more people use the internet, the more they see each other in person or talk over the phone. James Carey (2005) identified three major flaws in the way the argument about the internet evolved. Apart from inadequate grounding in the historical development of technology and the tendency to analyse the internet in isolation from wider technological context, the most important flaw in my opinion, is that much of the research failed to examine the internet in view of the social-economic circumstances of the *users* (:445). The Palestinian case is of great importance to reflect on these embedded understandings as it represents a diaspora community in need of transnational media/communication.

Nevertheless, the internet was soon also researched from this critical/embedded focus. Franklin (2001) describes how economic/political forces exploited technology for commercial, military, and political reasons, and demonstrates how the internet is implicated in power relations. In her research on the use of the internet among South Pacific diaspora Samoans, Franklin (2001) points to the different 'tales of internet' consisting of a top-down and a grassroots vision. This can alert us to examine how and in which conditions, under the influence of latent and manifested forms of control (and politicized context), different groups manage to (not) use the internet.

It is clear now that this approach does not disregard the option of the internet as a space where solidarity, mobilization, and self-empowerment are present. The internet facilitates the search for practical (on the ground) solutions to problems of isolation, discrimination, exclusion, and social/political conflicts. This dialectic understanding of the internet, media, and communication immediately tells us something about the political struggles implied. The way media, protest, and politics fuse, needs practical demonstration in order to understand at which level of Palestinian resistance internet technology may or may not be significant.

I also view the internet as a tool of everyday political practices. Moreover, the Palestinian case confirmed that the internet is both a non-elite tactic and a hegemonic strategy.[26] This dialectic approach unveils that cyberspace is a part of offline life: micro politics as practiced in local internet cafés are related to macro politics. If there would be an Internet Manifesto it might just as well start with the metaphor that *internet surfers make their own history, but not (always) according to their own chosen circumstances*. This contradiction captures the earlier mentioned tensions and relations by which the internet and Palestine are connected. The Palestinian case disproves many of the (dystopian and utopian) claims about the internet's impact. Evidently, discussions about theory also reflect choices and values regarding methodology.

1.4 Online-Offline Methodology: Anthropology from Below

> [Ethnography's] open-ended procedures refer both to the manner in which observations are made, and to the process of compiling a description. Far from truncating description, it has its own search engine in the form of a Question. What connections are going to be useful? … It pulls one in the situation of not necessarily wanting to tell in advance (Strathern 2000:59).

My methodological experiences were greatly affected by what was taking place in larger political contexts. As elaborated at the outset of this chapter, Palestinian society grew more impatient and protest erupted into a popular uprising in 2000. Many Palestinians supported the struggle because the situation became, *de facto* and *de jure*, unbearable.[27] The casualty/death toll on the Palestinian side was at least 10 times higher than the Israeli average and by January 2003 more than 2000 Palestinians had been killed and 21.000 injured.[28] In January 2006 the casualty toll grew to respectively 4000 and 31.000. As with the impact of the first Gulf (Iraq) War in 1991 on the First Intifada (1987-1993), the Second Intifada was again considered 'stuck' with the US War on Iraq in 2003. The 9/11 attacks had actually permanently determined the political reality, but the US invasion and occupation of Iraq affected the balance of power in the Middle East to the extreme. Palestinians became increasingly trapped between support of the principle to fight for independence, and scepticism with regards to how effective such an uprising would prove. Timing clearly influenced my research as the methodological challenges of curfews, closures, and deportation

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26 Subsequently, as can be noticed, I don't write internet with capital I.

27 The Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon by Hezbollah in May 2000 added legitimacy and credibility to armed resistance. Yet when Hamas won the Palestinian elections in 2006 showing broad support for resistance against Fatah, they were met by unprecedented punishment by the international community. The EU froze all financial support and boycotted the democratically elected PNA, causing a catastrophic degeneration and eventually leading to situations that could be described as a pre-civil war. The suffering of Palestinian citizens could now be blamed on Hamas by its competitor Fatah and US and Israeli politicians.

28 See http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp and
http://www.palestinercs.org/crisistables/jan_2003_table.htm

aforementioned made clear. As Strathern suggested in the opening quote, ethnography throws up the unplanned, the counter initiative, and, like the outbreak of the Intifada or 9/11: the unpredictable. These unplanned developments directly affected the stages of my fieldwork.

This project was born in the context of destabilization and extreme conflict in the Middle East between 2001 and 2005. During fieldwork in 2002, the rumours that attacks on Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah and "retaliations" on refugee camps were underway actually did come out; border controls became more restrictive and international activists, researchers, and media professionals were prevented entry. Meanwhile, life in Palestine itself was crippled by the curfews and closures. After two fieldwork visits I was deported from Palestine. This setback resulted in visiting Jordan where I conducted research that also enriched the work. Meeting people in the refugee camps outside Palestine shed new lights on my research project and on the impact of this Intifada on the Palestinian diaspora. Lebanon and Jordan taught me valuable lessons on the complex issues of exile in general, and internet use by Palestinian refugees more specifically.

The fieldwork was certainly shaped by the dominant political developments. My understanding of grassroots internet usage was enriched by ethnographic/multi-sited research. As a result, the fieldwork covered three phases—Palestine (2001/2002), Jordan (2003), and Lebanon (2003/2004). During the first phase (2001/2) I gained insights into the world of web-designers, internet producers, and telecom policies in the West Bank and Gaza. I conducted interviews with representatives of ICT companies, institutions/projects, and academics in the field of ICT; and observed/participated during activities in internet cafes, universities, and community centres. In the second phase (2003), I conducted research in Jordan when Israeli officials refused my entry into Palestine during my second visit. I focused on work visits in Wihdaad, al-Bekaa and Irbid refugee camps. I mostly held interviews with internet users and engaged in participant observations. Similar research activities were part of the last research phase in Lebanon (2003/4). Here the focus was in Palestinian refugee camps in/around Beirut, Tripoli, Sour, and Saida, and I continued to study people's everyday engagements with the internet (see figure 1, the lines on the map point to the camps in the three fieldwork sites.

In the former section I argued for a dialectic analyses in our theories, but these three different fieldwork practicalities have also stressed a dialectic approach between offline and online methodologies. This methodological dialectic refers to my views of the internet as a new *space* and as a new *tool*.

Internet as space of research

As there have been major changes in the way internet studies in different disciplines developed and the scope of research so far is immense, it is not possible to assess this in its totality. My aim is to bring methodology and analyses; i.e., online and offline community plus online and offline ethnography together. In other words, I bring the

internet as a tool and as a space together to outline material conditions and virtual experiences while using both material and virtual instruments.

Cyberspace is sometimes treated as an autonomous space that is de-linked from place or physical reality (Ellis et al [2004] discusses various positions on the topic). In the case of Palestine this virtual space is shaped mostly by a continual reference to a particular place. The internet is a tool of communication and can be an alternative meeting "space" where members of virtual communities meet on websites, chat rooms, online discussion lists, email, etc. However, this medium is not divorced from offline reality. It is a "space" that has to be entered via computers, cables, and so on; these are placed in houses, or internet cafés that are located in cities, refugee camps, occupied land, a host country, and so on.

It can be argued that Cyber space facilitates the erosion of national sentiments and supports transnational identities or disembodied worlds, but I suggested that in the case of Palestine the reverse might actually be true. Many websites feature flags or links to official/informational political sites. This can be taken as an indication that the internet does not weaken national identity but may even make it stronger. New modern technologies go hand in hand with traditional means of information dissemination. A clear example is when email messages are printed out and distributed to recipients, reaching people who don't use personal computers. I use these qualitatively motivated statements not to contradict the concepts of "virtual reality" and "cyberspace", but to connect offline with online realities.

A 'normative' or 'popular' conception of the internet may ascribe 'typical' behaviour to certain people or communities, but online dissemination does not have to correlate with offline opinion or behaviour. An over-generalization from online analysis may result in essentialist arguments that do not correspond to complex realities.[29] This problem stems from of the idea of the internet as an autonomous space that has its own independent effects on people. This representation is criticized, and echoed by Wellman's question of whether relationships between people who never see, smell, or hear each other, can be productive, supportive, or intimate (1997). This question relates to how we view cyberspace as a social phenomenon.

The internet offers new ways of creating identities and new spaces or self-representation. Whether the internet can be seen as a field site that can be studied through active participation in chat rooms or mailing list discussions, suggests another definition of the internet as an ethnographic space. I see the internet space as (an important part of) a public sphere rather than a virtual community and I take into

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[29] Hyped research such as *Internet & Jihad in the Netherlands* (Benschop, 2006) leads one to think that online politics reflects offline radicalization/behaviour of communities that are (predominantly) investigated. As a consequence, the study refers to specific (unidentifiable) online examples yet it authorizes larger assumptions about Moroccan culture/Muslim (youth) identities. This is irresponsible, especially with a currently fashionable trend of populist politicians (mis)using these reports, such as proposing new laws that demote former transparency/democracy codes, and to increase prison sentences. Thus, a person calling for jihad online is represented as having the same impact as organizing for jihad offline, and should therefore be punished in the same way.

account the different values given to online/offline space, face-to-face interaction, and multiple identities. It is easy to fall into the utopian discourse and subscribe to the argument that humankind is on the way to becoming 'cyborgs and androids' (Stockl 3003:72). There is a new reality when space and time overlap, and even where anonymity and accessibility are available we are dealing with complex relations. As I suggested in the aforementioned contradictions between virtual space/territorial place, and will explain further in Chapter two; we cannot make a snapshot of online space as we do with offline space, let alone expect the internet to construct and fulfil a sense of belonging in the same way.

Nonetheless, by pointing out the potential shortcomings of ethnographic (anthropologic) methodologies I do not imply that the internet has no effect on people. In fact, ample social science research on the internet's impact on communities indicates otherwise. The internet helps make public what was previously personal, and creates new links between individual and community. Research on the topic also includes debates about the very meaning of terms such as *virtual community* or *computer mediated communities*, as I will show in Chapter Two. Accordingly, I consider the dialectics of the internet in my research methodology as crucial and look at the offline/online processes that are involved. Contextualizing Palestinian internet activities within larger political-economic systems and developments helps transcend the 'the local/global' dichotomy. By following this multi-method approach, I wish to integrate specific (micro) ethnographic subjects within broader complex (macro) contexts like the nation-state, economic globalization, and transnational communication.

Communities may be imagined as virtual as well as actualized in interpersonal relationships (Strathern 2000:60). As the increasing mobility of ideas and products challenge fieldwork methodology, Marcus (1995) suggested examining the circulation of cultural meaning and identities in different time-space situations. These multi-sited fields are connected by the link between communities and ideas, thus can also be applied to internet research where online fields are constituted by (hyper) linkages between websites (Hine 2000:61). From this understanding, ethnography for internet research will help in studying social phenomena related to transnational communities.

If a location is both an online and offline phenomenon, than multi-sited here refers to online *and* offline sites. These approaches are particularly relevant in the case of Palestine. Ironically, research about Palestine on the ground means that it is difficult to conduct fieldwork. There are many problems that researchers face in conflict areas. The harsh everyday conditions may make online research techniques appear as attractive solutions and I was sometimes forced to experience this myself. With more and more conflicts infesting the world, this problem might generate an inclination towards conducting online research that obviously might fail to capture important offline realities. This is problematical because it can lead to less face-to-face interaction and more armchair anthropology.

Internet as tool of research

Besides gathering data through participant observation and interviews during the three different fieldwork phases/sites offline, I analysed the ways websites were presented/linked (online). I observed grassroots *and* top-down aspects of internet diffusion by studying internet producers and consumers on commercial, cultural, and political levels. On the ground and ethnographic examination tracks peoples activities and narratives "as they cross domains and thereby create heterogeneous social worlds" (Strathern 2000:59). It became clear that the internet is constituted by power relations; that the internet is "historically and socially constructed, rather than coming from nowhere" (Franklin 2001). *How* does the internet generate new national, religious, or political expressions and create possibilities of (individual) access to media and shape new collective imaginations? This question accounts even more for the transnational context involved in researching a nation such as Palestine.

To answer this important question we need to resort to an ethnography that is based on the juxtaposition of qualitative and quantitative issues. Several studies have avoided grand generalizations about the internet, and showed that ethnographic research offers substantiated analyses. Miller and Slater (2000) were among the first to address internet use in Trinidad and by the Trinidadian diaspora. They show that the internet does not produce its own conventions and society; the way in which people express themselves is only partly influenced by the internet. Moreover, there is no such thing as *The Internet* as many forms of media/contents are part of the internet.

Research often focuses on interactive communication in newsgroups, chat rooms, or websites (where communication is mainly text based); but there is also more space to study the offline social/political aspects of the internet. The availability of online technologies enhances our research methodologies, but it cannot replace the need for offline interviews and observations. If the aim is to know *how* people construct new identities on the internet, moving beyond content analysis and asking internet users what they experience or what their preferences are is more fruitful (Miller & Mather 1998). Hine (2000) made a similar suggestion and states that researchers need to go beyond the online text of, for example, a newsgroup posting or a webpage. Researchers need to include the producer of the text in their stories if they want to comprehend the context of production that gives rise to the product itself. Studying the role of the internet in constructing collective-national identities and in reconstituting the diaspora requires long-term engagement with the everyday life of the informants. Brouwer (2004) shows how qualitative methods, such as participant observation, informal interviews, structured interviews and literature, are crucial for internet research. This approach not only emphasizes/includes the informants' views, it also provides new questions and data.

Stockl calls this ethnography 'immersion': the ethnographer forms relationships with informants and the intimacy involved in this relation is fundamental. Immersion in the case of internet research "takes on the form of building relationships in terms of writing, in terms of reading emails, thinking about

them, reflecting about them, and finally answering them. Immersion in this case does not involve the constant presence of the researchers, but the field is constantly present in the ethnographers mind." This is a reversal of the "ethnographer-in-the-field to the field-in-the-ethnographer" (2003:74).

By combining offline and online research methodology I was able to see how Palestinians in the diaspora—in this case Jordan and Lebanon—seek to empower/represent themselves as members of national collectivities. I have argued that the internet is not to be understood as the substitute for an offline tool or spaces. Sometimes political contexts challenge our academic opinions by force. I therefore call for an anthropology *from below*; one that creates spaces for organic links and enables us to contribute to a positive change in everyday reality.

Organic Intellectuals

My own background had positive and negative consequences during research and fieldwork. The pro's of being Arab/Muslim, is that scepticism towards foreign researchers or journalists was less problematic.[30] At the same time, there are also cons because as an Arab I was more likely to be hampered by Israel for working and living in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. On the other hand, as a woman I sometimes experienced the limitations/barriers regarding my presence in public/private space, such as street activism, certain internet cafes, conducting visits in remote camps or during night hours, or meetings with leading/political spokesmen.

When encountering such minor and major problems during fieldwork in Jordan I could not rely on 'academic freedom' and police control in refugee camps complicated the work. Interviewing Palestinians in the camps was officially allowed only after obtaining permission from the government. Yet receiving the permission/green light to conduct interviews and participative observation was a laborious red tape process. Moreover, the issue of Palestinian refugees is politically sensitive in Jordan; sometimes people were overtly cautious during interviews and thus it required more time. The worst example was my deportation from Palestine after I tried to embark on my second fieldwork there.

The differences between the localities and countries researched also made me experience that the context of Palestine is marked by segregation, immobility, and military violence. During the first major fieldwork phase I stayed in the Occupied Territories for six months out of which I spent four months in partial (17.00-07.00) curfew and 30 days in full (24hr) curfew. During the last fieldwork month (Ramadan) of that phase the curfew was finally lifted. Throughout this whole period my base (Ramallah) was under closure, thus separated with military checkpoints from Birzeit and Jerusalem (therefore the rest of the West Bank). Checkpoints were often closed,

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[30] The scepticism is not without reason, see for example article by Timothy Mitchell, *The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science* (2003). Also the recruitment of anthropologists by the US Army in Afghanistan and Iraq has worried academics. See International Herarld Tribune. *Anthropologists help U.S. Army in Afghanistan and Iraq* By David Rohde Published: October 4, 2007.

preventing anyone going in or out. Many of my fieldwork contacts had regular jobs/classes so interview appointments after office/school hours were therefore difficult to achieve.[31] Conducting interviews during full curfew days was impossible. Visiting other Palestinian cities for interviews, participatory observation, and networking became even more complex. While reaching Gaza for interviews was a very difficult challenge; Nablus, Hebron and Jenin were impossible to reach because of the closures and physically difficult roads through hills and mountains.[32]

Instead of working and trying to reflect on the experiences and findings with a certain detachment, even for a 'foreign researcher with a safe passport' like me, life was often a hassle. The presence of an aggressive army in the direct (home) setting, limitations and exhausting treatments that everybody undergoes or has to witness at checkpoints, the regular disappointments due to cancellations and delays of meetings, and horrible news that contacts from former/new fieldwork visits were arrested, killed, or injured. A lack of motivation would arise after such experiences or made the project seem useless. It is impossible not to take matters personally if a researcher is confronted with such forms of repression. The voices and feelings in this book capture those particular moments and episodes. The Intifada, or what is left of it, is marked by a harsher reoccupation and destruction of Palestinian infrastructures. 'Objective' social science is a myth but we still have to be open about our ideas/interpretations by offering the necessary contexts. To give voice to Palestinians and participate in peace initiatives are important ways of being organically linked to this work beyond the strictly academic level.

The concept *organic intellectual*, introduced by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, suggests that the intellectuals' political life, principles, and work are connected. The anthropologist James Ferguson (1990) made a similar point when he asked what possibility there is for offering our engagement or expertise to emancipation and empowerment. Activism in academia is often 'not done', but researchers on the Middle East (especially of Arab/Muslim origin) are particularly 'suspect'. This new kind of McCarthyism after 9/11 is also challenged by initiatives such as *Academics for Justice*.[33] Nevertheless, we can make a difference for the people we have known as our neighbours and friends. I heard and read many stories about the history of Palestine, but as Abu Lughod (2004:35) noticeably described: "It is different to actually be there", and to be delayed, humiliated, interrogated, in fear, and disconnected from friends.

One of the most basic ways of an academics' engagement is through political participation in one's own society (Ferguson 1990:281). This is even truer for those working in the West where state politics contribute to the crises that our fieldwork

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[31] Because after school/work hours coincided with the lifting hours, people finish work/school and usually hurried to buy groceries or arrange the necessary tasks before curfew was imposed again.
[32] Besides social handicaps, the general immobility and these exhaustive experiences also confronted me with how a researchers' physical disability hampers fieldwork possibilities.
[33] See campaigns such as *Campus Watch* attacking US academics that are critical to Israel and American foreign politics. More about these developments are found on www.academicsforjustice.org

friends and contacts are confronted with. It is possible to challenge existing hegemonic forces via our NGOs, Unions, political parties, or universities. There is no guarantee that our involvement or information will be relevant—and where such alternative engagements are practiced against existing dominant orders, it may even cause difficulties in our work (Ferguson 1990:287). But: possibilities are there to be explored. And there are special opportunities (or even responsibilities) for political work amongst those with special knowledge and expertise, says Ferguson (1990):

> The anthropologist who has seen "his village" exterminated by death squads for instance, has both a special perspective and a distinctive political role to play on debates over aid to the "Contras" or support for El Salvador. Likewise, the field researcher who knows the Palestinians as real, flesh and blood human beings, and not only as shadowy figures brandishing machine guns, is in a position to combat the deceptions and misinformation that are put forward to justify the denial of Palestinian self determination (:286).

There will constantly be dilemmas and tensions between one's position as a researcher and (political) human being. Nevertheless, if researchers are present to write and discover more insights we can at least be hopefull that these new insights contribute to justice.

Outline

In the following chapters I address the contradictions that have puzzled me and answer the central questions about the role of the internet. I will focus on the creation transnational linkages and shaping of the collective imaginations of Palestinians, and how the internet is used in mobilizing local and transnational (pro) Palestinian activism. This and the next chapter are introductions to theoretic, historic and technological contexts. Chapter Two will contextualize the research according to the three tensions and assess the history and relevance/impact of internet technology.

Chapter Three will cover the first contradiction and studies Palestinian (im)mobility with regards to new virtual realities. Chapters Four, Five, and Six cover the second contradiction and investigate offline/online practices. Chapter Four examines how virtual space is related to territorial place and engages with the debate about nation-state/collective identity. In Chapter Five I intend to unravel the relation between national identity and internet developments by looking at virtual representations through a study of Palestinian websites. In Chapter Six I examine the offline/everyday impacts of internet technologies in the diasporic contexts.

Chapter Seven and Eight epitomize the third tension, as well as contribute to the discussions ensuing from this research. In Chapter Seven I focus on the political assessments that are bound with the internet and portray how Palestinian political agency transcends into virtual reality. The aim is to study the positive and negative effects of these practices, especially in the context of occupation and exile. Chapter

Eight presents a critical debate about the potentials of the internet. These assessments are an overlap between activist and academic discourses aiming to bridge both worlds by engaging with debates of social movements and activism.

These twofold terrains of contestation include my aim to challenge political and academic paradigms. This aim was shaped by the point in time described in this book and is relevant in more than one way. The research coincides with a period when ICT began to be introduced on massive scales in the Arab/Muslim world; a part of the world where war increasingly dominates the lives of ordinary people; when the Intifada was at its peak and the social and political possibilities of internet for Palestinians astonished many; in other words a historic period and the *remake* of a Middle East at the start of the 21st Century, when all the above aspects intersect and influence one another. And still do.

Chapter 2: Technological & Political Infrastructures

2.1 Introduction

The place and the timing of this research reflected two crucial developments that eventually fused: (1) regional instability resulting from occupation and war, and (2) the explosion of ICT ventures. To get a sense of how the availability of the internet as a new mass medium excited many Palestinians, we need only search *Google* to be overwhelmed by the enormous amount of Palestinian online forums, mailing lists, and websites. The most fiercely debated topic on the internet during my research concerned pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian coverage in mainstream media.

Exaggerated media views, such as Palestinian mothers sending their children to martyrdom or volunteer suicide bombers that are promised many virgins in paradise were some examples of how hegemonic discourses function. The negative characterization of Palestinians and the positive bias in favor of the Israeli narrative are obvious in news coverage analysis.[34] Many believed that this type of bias limit international support for the Palestinian cause by which foreign governments can side with Israel. The availability of mass electronic and internet media therefore constituted a crucial improvement for Palestinian resistance in 2000/2001. The effective appropriation of modern media technologies by Palestinians reached a peak after the outbreak of the Intifada in 2000. During an interview in Gaza in 2002 Ahmed Abu Marzouk told me:

> During the first six months (of the Intifada), we saw an extensive growth [of Internet utilization] because people were stuck at home, bored, and frustrated. The Internet also became the only source of accurate news, and of chatting, which is very important because people needed more means of communication to talk and express themselves.[35]

According to information in the Israeli and Palestinian press, the Palestinian firm with the most profits in 2001/2 was PalTel telecommunications. Due to the increasing forced immobility, closures, and curfews – and despite them, the Palestinian community relied even more on new-media to stay informed on the outbreak of the Intifada; meanwhile, the international community was tapping into Palestinian sources for alternative (i.e., locally produced) information. In addition to the economic and political decision-making of the PNA to infuse the Telecom sector,

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[34] There are many examples, such as the account of a former conservative journalist/reporter at Fox News having been reprimanded for refusing to say 'homicide bombings' instead of the already subjective 'suicide bombings' (in 2004 documentary "Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism"*)*. And the book 'Het Zijn Net Mensen' (They are like (normal) people) by Joris Luyendijk (2005) deconstructs how the Western media contributed in dehumanizing Palestinians.

[35] Abu Marzouk was an internet expert and director of Palestine Internet Services in Gaza.

socio-political factors also critically contributed to the rise of internet usage by Palestinians. Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz stated: "…perhaps because of the roadblocks and transportation difficulties, people are using the telephone more".[36] Palestinians began to have a voice and face, but they were also revealing their everyday conditions. They communicated their own political and cultural message to the 'outside' world because they regarded Western media to be biased about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This bias, resulting from either intentional distortions or unconscious prejudice/ignorance, made Palestinians easy targets for propaganda. Sometimes, even the terms 'Palestinians' and 'Palestine' is controversial.[37]

September 11, 2001 was like a magnifying glass: the fusion of technology and politics made awareness of the potentials of ICT even more necessary. The development of mass media created new patterns in the evolution of media and communication technologies, both affecting the synthesis of community participation. The various "tales of internet" sketched in the first chapter suggest two ways of understanding ICT. The most widely disseminated is a top-down effect that emanates from corporate marketing strategies; the alternative tale emerges from the activities of diasporic groups on the internet interacting with each other and their countries of origin (Franklin (2001). The internet is a space for solidarity and empowerment and a tool for agency and resistance.

This chapter will outline the various concepts elaborated in the subsequent chapter. The first section presents my analysis and understanding of virtual space/territorial place, resistance/oppression, and mobility/immobility. Despite the empowering characteristics of internet; the disempowering capitalist hegemony and materiality of technology need to be discussed as well. The second section of this chapter aims at offering a brief history of ICT in the Palestinian context and situates the internet within an offline Palestinian (embedded) perspective.

2.2 Framing the 'Tensions'

In Chapter One I introduced three tensions: mobility/immobility, space/place, and resistance/oppression. The three themes present the theoretical frameworks of this study. I do not offer an exhaustive (disciplinary) description of the theoretical debates, but rather refer to these key concepts from a grounded approach and as I understand them from the perspectives of social reality and technology. The *first* tension is the issue of mobility. I understand mobility in relation to the offline realities of Palestinian immobility, diaspora, and exile. The virtual space/territorial place dichotomy, the *second* tension, deals with concepts of nation-state and trans-national identity and their

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[36] By Danny Rubinstein in Ha'aretz. *Survival Strategy*. Tuesday, February 5, 2002. This is also a relevant indication because at the time the telephone connection was often used for internet access.
[37] During one of the first academic conferences I attended, one participant repeatedly objected to my use of the term *Palestine*. I discovered that also a discussion from a Palestinian perspective is a problem for some.

relation to virtual communities. Closely linked to the issue of nation-state/transnational communities, is grassroots resistance. In the *third* tension I question how (in the Palestinian context of occupation and oppression) dominant public spaces are contested and counter-public spheres designed. By explaining how resistance can be understood, I offer a glimpse of what virtual grassroots agency looks like and how it affects (or is affected by) the people involved.

"Oslo" failed for many reasons, but fundamentally because the Israeli colonial occupation continued with structural and full control of Palestinian life. This un-equal relation between the occupier and occupied led to the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000. A deeper frustration that reaches across all sections in (trans)national Palestinian community, is the question of mobility; or better formulated: the lack of mobility and forced mobility.

Ideal Mobility—Colonial Immobility: Place, Nation, State

> The 1948 Palestine-Israel war is known to Israelis as 'The War of Independence', but for Palestinians it will forever be the *Nakba*, the 'catastrophe'. Alongside the creation of the State of Israel, the end of the war led to one of the largest forced migrations in modern history. Around a million people were expelled from their homes at gunpoint, civilians were massacred, and hundreds of Palestinian villages deliberately destroyed. Though the truth about the mass expulsion has been systematically distorted and suppressed, had it taken place in the twenty-first century it could only have been called 'ethnic cleansing'. Pappe (2006)

Whereas analyses regarding mobility may cover that of people, ideas, and commodities, mobility in a Palestinian context refers mostly to people's experiences born of forced migration. The frustration about mobility is a consequence of the refugee problem and the fate of Palestinians who are displaced or ethnically cleansed since 1948 (Aruri 2001). Such experiences of mobility may differ according to historical timing, class, and reflect different diasporic groups—stateless refugees, political exiles, and successful expatriates. The remigration of Palestinian elite classes to after the Oslo agreement has also resulted in a number of ICT specialists returning to Palestine. In due course these successful *returnees* crafted the intellectual and technological backbone of the internet in Palestine. A majority of Palestinians that represent 'transnational mobility' are the result of *forced mobility* after deportation during the 1948 Nakba, as depicted by Pappe in the opening quote; as well as the 1967 military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. In other words, to understand the issue of Palestinian mobility, we must grasp the reality of Palestinian refugees and the notions of diaspora and displacement.

The Palestinian diaspora community can roughly be divided in three categories: refugees with travel documents (mainly Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and former Iraq), nationals of convenience (mostly those with temporary Jordanian passports),

and PA/Palestinian passport holders (i.e. travel documents in West Bank and Gaza).[38] Statelessness and changing concepts of citizenship are sensitive issues, especially vis-à-vis the historical rights of the Palestinian diaspora and the political and economic responsibilities of host countries. Shiblek shows that *the* crucial question regarding stateless Palestinian communities is protection.[39] The exclusion of Palestinian refugees as part of the general international refugee policy (i.e. exclusion is basically based on political grounds) undermines the effort to gain equality and a form collective community.

The forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948 resulted in what is considered one of the most difficult refugee problems today. In 1967, when Israel occupied the remaining West Bank and Gaza, thousands of Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and villages again resulting in another flow of refugees makes internally displace Palestinians part of the diaspora as well. The relative autonomy of Oslo's 1993 agreement ended abruptly in a (re)occupation in 2000; it fuelled not only violence, but also (often online) discussions about what it means to be 'Palestinian' and definitions of 'diaspora' and 'refugee'. Though 'diaspora' might also assume a certain 'voluntarism', this is not applicable to exiled Palestinians who are not permitted to return or even visit Palestine. Only a minority of Palestinians who lived in the West or were part of Arafat's Fatah cadre managed to return to Palestine after Oslo.[40] Thus it is complicated to discuss 'the' Palestinian diaspora since Palestinians are dispersed all over the world, and (fragmented) by the expulsion of more than three quarter of its population. Moreover, political differences in status between Palestinians related to state-politics are itself a product of historic/demographic circumstances (see Chapter Three).

What kind of connectedness and mobility do new-media technologies such as the internet enable in this context of exile and immobility? This question is related to the (assumed) transformation of the social-political effects of ICT processes that led to for example 'network societies'. Understanding the connection between the internet and the production of virtual space is crucial to our (theoretical) engagement with internet cultures (Terranova 2004). Transnational mass media developments are introduced as a *culture of virtuality* characterized by a *timeless time* and a *placeless space,* in Castells's Trilogy (1996, 1997, 1998). The analyses are driven by the hypothesis of a 'new type' of society and focus on the dynamic junction between flows of virtual space and physical space. Castells presented the new type of society by delineating various (dialectical) oppositions between the internet and the self. People,

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[38] See (Rempel and Shiblek) *Forced Migration Review* special on Palestinian refugees (no. 26, reference 2996).
[39] Enforcing this reality are the restrictive laws based on the reactionary principle of *jus sanguine*, nationality by descent, that statelessness can be inherited and passed on through generations.
[40] Many returnees from the West with EU or US passports can enter Palestine with a tourist visa. In 2006 many Palestinians were refused entry however, as in the case of Sam Bahour *We Can't Go Home Again*. http://www.amin.org/look/amin/en.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=7&NrArticle=37435&NrIssue=1&NrSection=3. 09 October 2006, on Arab Media Internet Network.

commodities, information, and ideas (i.e., transnational globalization), seem to be interrelated with mass-mediated networks and trespassing state-structures.[41]

The public sphere seems to have adopted a 'real' and a 'virtual' character as a result of electronic communications and globalization. Yet the internet needs to be embedded in the structures of diasporic/exile realities. For instance, while it may be possible to modify internet technology for diasporic communities, for members of a diasporic group the internet cannot reverse or escape the larger patterns of social realities (Dawson 2003:1). If we wish to consider the consistency of computer-mediated diasporic communities, we have to deal with conceptual issues of immobility which also relate to virtual community. I compare physical and virtual mobility (Chapter Three) because being denied the choice to move or maintain personal face-to-face relations with friends and family impacts the meaning of 'nation' and 'national community'.

Transnationalism and *mobility* are interrelated concepts—transnationalism perceives mobility and migration as characteristic elements—and these concepts are sometimes fused with the notion of *virtual* mobility. Nations are concurrently affected by transnational influences and the development of mass media. Transnationalism refers to long distance networks, including multinational capitalist enterprises, international political movements, and diasporic communities. The development of ICT (and internet access) is one of the clearest novelties linked to new political-economic systems of globalization. Having said that, the concept of transnationalism is ambiguous, representing disciplinary differences from emancipatory to hegemonic dispositions. In *Transnationalism from Below* Smith and Guarnizo (1998) theorize transnational processes and explain that we should understand this as a complex process that needs to be studied from different levels of analyses; seen through the prism of the local, national, and global. As they argued, transnationalism is characterized by the intersection of migration processes, globalization of capitalism, and technological revolution (:17-24). The *intersectionality* of the concept of transnationalism also confirms that transnational identity is not evidently linked to growing mobility. In fact, the problem is that, as Eagleton notes, "the rich have mobility while the poor have locality. Or rather, the poor have locality until the rich get their hands on it" (2004:22).

Transnationalism does not prove that mobility coincides with a decreasing value of national identity. This important analysis of mobility echoes Castells above proposition and relate to the debate concerning shifts from modern (i.e. 'outdated') nation-states to postmodern communities.[42] It is argued that because of these transnational shifts nation-states have lost sovereignty and power. Appadurai observes that communication through electronic media, like the television and cinema, led to the formation of 'communities of sentiment' (1996:8). In this view, the nation is

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[41] The suggestion of a *free* flow of networks is striking. But identity/self is dialectically related with society and influenced by political/economic state affairs. Hence, the conclusions that new social structures lead to a decrease of state structures are not easily substantiated.

[42] For a discussion about the theoretical inputs of Giddens see Vertovec (1999).

considered transnational but also in *competition* with the state. However, the (emotional) power and (political) sovereignty of nation-states *as such*, are not decreasing. So while acknowledging the importance of change and internal contradictions, the notion of nation-state as an outdated concept is like throwing away the baby with the bathwater; it easily gives in to the postmodern view that the state is itself is a redundant concept. On the contrary, states are entangled with political and economic power, perhaps now more than ever. Within the 'new' globalized capitalist system, transnational enterprises are protected and governed by their companies' state (interests). The direct war in Iraq and Afghanistan abroad (and the indirect attack on civil liberties at home) illustrate how states practice their power in the name of the nation. These international processes led to more policing of subaltern classes, as well as an increase of nationalism and Islamophobia (Fekete 2006a 2006b). Furthermore, this tendency contributes to the politics of coercion, and limits the potential for collective resistance by the different (sometimes competing) subordinate classes *within* states. These social impacts call to attention our understanding of nation-states with regards to national identity.

Baumann argues that there has never been a nation-state that was not multi-cultural, and that in fact a culturally homogenous nation-state with one language only exists in schoolbooks, manuals for the military, and in the media (2007:5). This criticism touches on a very important point regarding the failure to forcibly integrate (i.e. assimilate) communities/cultures in order to produce nation-states. His important criticism is a reminder that the army, education system and media are merged with nation-state ideology. They continue to animate (imagined) ideals of ethnic superiority and national canons. The state is "far from dead as protagonists of capitalist globalization need the nation-state to control the international market" (Baumann 2007:5). Thus, whereas the (dominant-national) media is *the* instrument being challenged through the utilization of new technologies, this study shows that the failure to *mould* nations into a solitary state does not mean that states fail to *monopolize* the necessary vehicles. State policy and everyday (community) practices (sometimes also internalized by minority groups) derived from these logics therefore do exist; nationalist idealization/imagination is alive and kicking. As Baumann continues to argue:

> Populism, xenophobia and radical exclusion sealed this wholesale abandonment of political, civic, and civil values in the face of globalization. At present, the state is again being peddled, by losers and demagogues, as one nation, as if the state were an ethno-national organism; the nation is peddled as one culture, as if citizenship were a matter of culture; and culture is reduced to birth or descent …" (:9).

But why do diasporic/oppressed communities *also* ascribe strong meaning to national inspired frameworks? If xenophobia is a reminder of the top-down/'Western' framework of nation-state, another important reference and reminder is related to a progressive/bottom-up process of state building/national identity. Eriksen (1993) described how diasporic national identities particularly relates to *non-state* (contested)

groups as Palestinians. These (often oppressed) communities function as 'proto-nations' that strongly hold on to a national identity. Palestinians are one of the largest stateless communities in the world (fourth/fifth generation since 1948), certainly not enjoying transnational mobility. These parallel/uneven developments need to be included in a critical deconstruction of the 'global village'. Brian Larkin's (2002) use of *parallel modernities* is an alternative way to link immobility, transnationalism, and imagined communities, and to describe the worlds of those who are not mobile but nonetheless (through media) participate in the imagined realities as part of their lives.

A new understanding of *imagined community* (since the growing use of electronic media) reformulates these alternatives. The birth of the "imagined community" of a nation happened through early mass media forms such as the novel and newspaper. Although rarely referred to in discussions about imagined communities, these new mediations were also shaped by local travel experiences. Early colonial administrators' territorial *traversals* and print capitalism in the Americas were important, Anderson (1981) refers to the *'carriers'* of modern nation-states (Chapter One). Many studies have focused on the impact of European (colonial) history on the construction of modern capitalist nation-states. It is also interesting to examine historical examples that are not per-se products of (colonial) capitalism but hint at a different process and construction of national identity in order to understand the progressive alternative of state building.

CLR James' (1980) narrative is one of the most inspiring references. The San Domingo revolution brought an end to an improbable chapter in history when Toussaint L'Ouverture's forces broke the chains of colonial slavery. Historically concurrent with the French and American Revolutions, though rarely referred to in the literature dealing with the birth of (imagined) nation-states, the Haitian Revolution established one of the first independent modern nation-states. Of the three this was the only revolution that forced an unconditional application of the principle to affirm natural, inalienable rights for all human beings (Hallward 2004). Political and national mobilizations are here based on anti-slavery/anti-colonial motives and identity associated with anti-colonial struggles. Rather than color/descent or competition-motivated nationalism, membership was based on shared suffering and struggle. This dynamic defines the concepts of nation and state differently:

> The odds it had to overcome are evidence of the magnitude of the interests that were involved. The transformation of slaves, trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organise themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day, is one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and achievement.

It showed a unique and alternative framework: The San Domingo revolution in 1791, two years after the French revolution, lasted 12 years until the defeat of Bonaparte's expedition in 1803 resulted in the establishment of 'the first Negro State of Haiti' (C.L.R. James 1980:ix).

For many Palestinians, the symbolic expression of national identity is a political affair and not a self-evident liberty. Thus there is a need to broaden our

critical understanding of nation-state formation (the conception thereof and its related struggles) in researching Palestine. This need arises from the assumption that the division of humankind into national entities is 'natural', and that the right of self-determination is validated when a community can demonstrate its (early) self-awareness/identification as a nation (Sayigh 1997:xiii). Therefore, until elementary rights are won, it is rather abstract to deny the value of national territory, borders, or constitutions. And according to Schulz (1999), the Palestinian case is unique regarding the construction of national identity because of colonial occupation and forced immobility/diaspora.

Dominant power structures provided a political impulse in the evolution of Palestinian national identity and the organizational dynamic of its armed struggle. Schulz argues that Palestinian nationalism is a result of (everyday) violent confrontations with Zionism and, later, the state of Israel, as well as the product of nationalist discourses of (exiled) Palestinian political elites.[43] Thus, apart from the top-down nationalism criticized above, this *anti-colonial nationalism* is what I recognised in the online traversals amongst many Palestinians (see Chapter Four). Moreover, the Palestinian colonial experience is unique because the *existence* of Palestinians as a people or nation was/is denied. Zionist groups that gained influence during the British colonial dominance of Mandate Palestine particularly instrumented this representation of Palestinians (Chapter One).

Palestinian uprisings, from 1936 during the British Mandate to the last Intifada in 2000, affect the Palestinian sense of self and character of the Palestinian struggle. Palestinian evolution of politics, ideological discourses, and organizational structures, were also connected to armed struggle (Sayigh 1997). It is in this historical context that my references to national identity in Chapter Three and Four should be understood. Before I discuss the broader struggles and resistance, I wish to understand how state/national perceptions relate to *place/space* and *virtual community*.

Virtual *Space* & Territorial *Place:* Identity, Community, Networks

> Perhaps cyberspace, with its capacity to externalize our innermost fantasies in all their inconsistency, opens up to the artistic practice a unique possibility to stage, to "act out", the fantas-matic support of our existence, up to the fundamental "sadomasochistic" fantasy that cannot ever be subjectivized… Far from enslaving us to these fantasies and turning us into desubjectivized, blind puppets, it enables us to treat them in a playful way and thus to adopt toward them a minimum of distance. Zizek (1998)

The concepts of space and place, central to understanding the geographies of the internet, raise many questions as confirmed in the previous section. How up to date

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[43] For more on this history see Schulz' (1999) *The reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: between revolution and statehood.*

are the frameworks of nation, place, and identity in terms of transnational media technologies? And how can *techno-capitalism* influence internet mediated communities and identity? Is virtual space another kind of place, or does this 'different' type of space imply a new kind of interactivity? Geographers have long studied the twin concept space/place, which has become synonymous with the twin concept offline/online. Approximately a decade ago, Adams (1997) had already discerned geographically related metaphors for internet spaces: 'electronic frontier', 'cyber space', 'information highway'. *Space* and *place* are evocative (yet sometimes complex) terms for understanding the tensions between 'place' as territory/state and the loose, collective 'space' as imaginary nation-state. In other words, space, place, and (nation) state are closely intertwined.

The affiliation between virtual space and national space is critical: binary views and either-or evaluations of place vs. space or nation vs. state are thus rarely helpful. Viewing the nation (-state) as an ethnically/culturally bounded entity therefore reflects a static perceptive and is considered in many fields of study a-historic and essentialist. An important reality is that societies imagine/identify itself through the (construction and consumption of) mass media. Although an emerging 'post-industrial' capitalism has been characterized by the decline of the state and the increasing power of the international market, nation-state institutions remain extremely important, as illustrated by military responses after 9/11 (Kellner 2002:290).

Nation-states are ideologically constructed and can shape national identities as suggested before. This study is concerned with understanding virtual space and identity as it is shaped by particular social-economic histories and contexts, set within a particular reality and objective conditions. These material conditions may or may not migrate from offline settings to online representations. They usually migrate to varying degrees, depending on the participant's personal motivation, class, and technological access. Furthermore, online participation is not a static process but susceptible to change. Like offline events, online experiences are simultaneously inspired by political, private, and community concerns, which means that multiple motivations and identities occupy similar online activities. An important element in the debate on the decline of territorial importance caused by internet technology is the emergence of *virtual communities*. A requirement for a virtual type of 'community', and in order to experience a certain 'virtual' existence through computer-mediated communication, is regular connectivity via ICT. Online interactivity can then be sustained through mailing lists, chat rooms, or *Messenger*; it can be individual or group-based, visible or secret, public or anonymous. Easy access to the internet made it also more appealing to marginal or diaspora groups. But does virtual community have ontological status, or is it less 'real' than other forms of community?

Early contributions have argued that new communities could crystallize around virtual cyberspaces by interacting electronically. Rheingold (1993) suggested that former spaces of community were disappearing and replaced by virtual community. A question that follows from this is whether the virtual state approximates the Palestinian nation (state). The idea of a virtual Palestinian

community is important in order to study the immediate question it raised, namely: can online community be perceived as a substitute? The concept of transnationalism sometimes overstates the aspect of mobility. Problems of diasporic exile/immobility are clear for many Palestinians that are under curfew, do not have travel permissions, still have no right to return, and are deal with the agony of post 9/11 restrictions on Arab travellers. Online practices are shaped by experiences of exclusion, isolation and oppression: the necessity to connect online is strengthened by Palestinians' curiosity and lies in their desire to meet offline. This is especially important for refugees who seek out to others with similar experiences, interests, and shared commitments, thus the Palestinian online community evokes transnational unity.

This does not mean that virtual and territorial communities are equivalent, particularly when considering issues of power. Palestinians prefer the offline 'real' community because virtual contact cannot replace face-to-face contact. Is there, in fact, really some sort of 'timeless' and 'spaceless' dimension? External events or 'real' constraints have a direct impact on virtual communities. The point I am trying to make is that neither space, nor place, nor time, are gone. This is clearly confirmed by the online references to Palestinian history and historical demarcation points like 1948, 1967, and 1982. Ismael Neshef, anthropologist at Birzeit University in the West Bank, commented during an interview in 2002 that:

> There is something in the structure of this conflict that makes the medium of the internet even more relevant. This is the concept of space, movement, and borders. Space is central, the first attraction of virtual reality is control of space, and the dialectic relation between virtual and on the ground space. Because of these realities, space is transcending but it is not merely virtual, and while it gives a sense of empowerment it doesn't give real power because it is still limited by objective conditions, for example simply the economic factor. Nevertheless, for the Palestinians it is the idea of a counter or alternative space that makes the virtual so attractive. It is thus significant to remember that space, place, and time have different meanings for Palestinians [due to closure/curfews].

It is thus important to know how virtual space is perceived and tactically employed as well. Much of the literature on computer-mediated communication for example assumes that it is an interactive medium but differences in interactivity are shaped by *technological* (nature of the interface) and *social* (user style preference/utilization) factors (McMillan (2002). What is perceived as positive interactivity depends on factors that go beyond the technological. In the opening quote Zizek identifies the unique possibilities of cyberspace, which he connects to alternative, *playful,* ways of challenging power structures.

Internet use may alter the geographic organization of the economy, but our sense of identity (and how the places in which we live and work are perceived) has also reconnected us to concrete places (Zook 2006:69). Internet technology has certainly created new opportunities for interaction between people and places (in earlier stages excitedly referred to as the *global village)*, but what are the characteristics

determining the outcome and structure of place and space and how should they be understood in offline terms? The 'new' opportunities offered by internet space are by no means a free and open substitute for the territorial place, village, or state. According to Wellman, academic interest in virtual communities and the study of these communities led to a neglect of some elementary social issues, such as the materiality of power and the interactive offline/online connection (Wellman & Hampton 1999:649).

So what are the criteria for a virtual, in this case also diasporic, community? Do we see a transformation from everyday communities to virtual social networks? If so, this cannot be generalized as a global phenomenon, or automatically linked to having internet access because the internet needs to be situated in a larger context, including the transformation of dominant patterns of social paradigms. There is indeed an affinity between life online and 'networked individualism'. The internet certainly supports this pattern of sociability, as both Wellman and Castells showed in their studies. But the transformation of community also predated, or happened independently of, the internet. Actually, and according to Dawson (2003), internet media may also pose problems to the structure/development of diasporic communities because this type of communication is a more "individualistic and impersonal form of interaction than some diasporic/religious communities would care to support" (2003:1). In other words, computer-mediated diasporic communities stir conceptual questions about new social networks as communities that can be clarified with ethnographic work.

Research in Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon confirm that diaspora communication is often expressed as collective rather than individual interaction. In addition, offline and online diaspora interaction vis-à-vis national identity and community often merge. Online sociability is thus a fact of everyday life, the question remains whether online groups/interactions is the same as Virtual Communities? Feenberg and Bakardjieva (2004) explain that our approach should neither be strictly defined (face-to-face interaction is always required) nor completely open (long-distance community is only imagined). This means that communities do include some form of virtuality; social practices are *virtually* mediated as well as *actually* experienced. Even though this does not *"live up to the glorified and normatively laden concept of virtual community"* (Dawnson 2003:38), the internet has fostered new online groups.

Due to the real offline experiences of isolation and immobility, virtual mobility and online interactivity often reflect a need to 'escape'. The sense of simulation through virtual participation implies that it is *not real,* as elaborated in the discussion of *virtual reality/space*. Interesting parallels can be found between escapism and simulated experiences of mobility. By countering the ineffectual dichotomy through a dialectic approach, I propose that escapism is not a mutually exclusive virtue/phenomenon, neither in terms of effect (liberation/false consciousness), nor in terms of motivation (to avoid offline reality/to need offline relations). We can distinguish different meanings of escapism; and a multiple interpretation is important

because the context is crucial as it explains the point from escape is needed (Evans 2001:60).

Escapism is not necessarily related to the inability to deal with situations in the here/everyday; this may suggests that people are not willing to improve/change their reality. But what of the Palestinian who wants to go for a walk in the green fields near Tarsheha or Jerusalem but is faced by a thick and high segregation wall (Chapter Three and Four)? What of the Palestinian romantic who dreams of experiencing physical love with another Palestinian, but will never be able to because he/she does not have legal/national documents or the permission to cross borders and meet the lover face-to-face (see Chapter Six)? What of the urge to participate in the Palestinian uprising and join the resistance but the impossibility to do so because one is exiled (see Chapter Seven)?

Online space also conscripts offline space; internet cafes are the potent evidence of this interface. Oldenburg (1999) developed an interesting conceptual framework for examining the link between the internet café and the public sphere; for he sees the café as the heart of the community's social vitality. By *Situating* ICs in their offline setting and looking at the different sites and their electricity and power supply status and building permits, I offer a technological and social, or *technosocial* (Lægran and Stewart 2003), context. Hence, *virtual or real?"* (Etzioni 1997) is not the actual question; yet the inherited contradictions presented here do raise questions as to overcoming dominant structures that ascribe meaning d to the virtual. This interdisciplinary approach also applies to the dialectic impact of globalization and politics: the internet can validate/strengthen or eradicate/weaken national identity, and in the next section I argue that and it can constitute or counter political agency and resistance.

Resistance & Oppression: Utopian and Dystopian forecasting

> The [post-colonial theory] shift of focus was also one from politics to culture. This reflected real changes in the world, but it also helped to depoliticize the question of post-colonialism and inflate the role of culture within it. … Some thinkers seem to believe that minorities are always more vibrant that majorities. … It was majorities, not minorities, which confounded imperial power in India and brought down apartheid. Those who oppose 'norms', 'authority' and 'majorities' as such, are abstract universalists, even though most of them oppose abstract universalism as well. Eagleton (2004:12-15)

Everyday resistance in Palestine and in the Palestinian diaspora is connected to the struggle for national self-determination. The meaning given to national/collective identity is marked by resistance and political mobilization. However, national collective identity is not a given but constantly reshaped: neither the claim of a primordial national identity nor denial of Palestinian national identity is very relevant. Palestinians have been engaged in a process of anti-colonial resistance and nation

building for almost a century. State-building dynamics are not always a result of official independence; it can be argued that the PLO emerged as the non-territorial equivalent of a state (Sayigh 1997). To understand resistance of contemporary social movements we also need to study how political processes are connected to the notion of globalization. This will help uncover how the internet can reinforce oppression as well as resistance.

Melucci (1996) was one of the first scholars in social movements/collective action to introduce the concept 'new social movements'. Melucci argued that social movements are inherently complex and therefore, collective national identity is not an essential force but an outcome of negotiation. His notions of 'new' social movements were not meant as showing class conflict versus collective action, as often represented. Yet, to Melucci's dismay, the 'new' notion became increasingly reified as a category, presenting a false contradiction between supporters of the *old* and *new* movement theories (Melucci 1996:6). Political movements show an accumulation of different (new/former) degrees of collective action; sometimes witnessing leaps in the way conflict and protest is managed. I agree that there is no 'new' without the 'old', therefore we cannot understand the collective outburst of the 2000 Intifada without knowing of the aftermath of the First Intifada in 1987. Nor can we analyze the fantastic possibilities for political activism that arise through internet technologies without understanding the importance of under/on-the-ground resistance. Therefore, while the internet can serve as a catalyst in organizing the public sphere, political and social hegemony can still prevent this from occurring. Cyber spatial technology and ICTs can have liberating and empowering potential, but as Dahhan (2003) argued in the case of a different ICT impact on Palestinians and Israelis, they also *replicate* existing inequalities.

Warner's understanding of *counterpublics* helps deconstruct the underlying battles for gaining access to the dominant public sphere. The conflict raised by counterpublics extends not just to "ideas or policy questions, but to the speech genres and modes of address that constitutes the public" and thus confronts the hierarchy of the media (2002:86). This is reminiscent of the *tactical* and *practical* methods inspired by De Certeau in *Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). De Certeau's position reveals a dynamic relation between elites and non-elites: oppressed classes may possess 'tactical' means to resist hegemonic representations and oppression.[44] By relating these 'counter' methods to the importance of counter hegemonic (alternative) media, I view the internet as a tactic political tool *and* as a part of the everyday life practices. This interrelated and materialist understanding of the internet is not always considered important however.

I perceive two major views in discussions about potentials for protest and resistance as related to internet politics. The *utopian* view regards many types of actions as activism or even resistance—derived from mainly positively underlining power and

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[44] Franklin (2001) elaborates on De Certeau's concepts and argues that how people relate to each other, how practice produces inventions is central (71-72).

agency. A more *dystopian* line of thought questions the possibilities for successful political engagement.[45] Both are also frameworks with which to assess internet politics. Fenton (2005) shows how Hardt and Negri reinterpreted Foucault's complex concept of the 'biopolitical', politics become intertwined with commercial interests; what appears to be political may be just market-based activism. Advocates of this *biopolitics* argue that new forms of social militancy are allowed within capitalism without a real possibility of transcending it (Fenton 2005:8). This dystopian type of critique is relevant;, in fact both dystopian *and* utopian arguments can be made, and they are clearly present.[46]

From a dystopian perspective, Yahoo, Microsoft and corporate America have power over activists because they create and develop the techniques and mailing lists that activists use. But if we take the latter too far, everyday politics can be reduced to a 'game', designed to de-radicalize people; then resistance itself is merely an illusion since people/activists are co-opted by the system/power. Does Bill Gates also control/shape the activists' decision-making, their political content, and goals or successes? Having scarcely any clarity of what is/isn't political resistance or a dialectic view of everyday internet politics, leads toward a dystopian disposition even where it is not needed. A closer look at how resistance and protest movements (such as Hamas, Hezbollah, anti-capitalist and anti-war activists) utilize/mobilize online, do not imply so. There are different ways to understand the overlapping and contradicting dynamics. In order to successfully connect to political movements and build stronger networks, mobilization/resistance belongs in both offline and online spheres (Chapter Seven).

The debates on biopolitics evoke another important influence that leads to ascribing utopian/dystopian views to resistance. In *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004) Hardt and Negri discuss how the transformations of neo-liberal globalization affect the imperial/economic logic, political struggle, and resistance movements connected to it. They describe globalization as a complex process that involves a *fusion* of global capitalist market systems, new technologies, media, changing modes of governance, and (particularly important to this discussion) the development of *new* forms of resistance. Using '*multitude*' to refer to a new collective resistance and substituting *working class* with '*new barbarians*' or simply *'the poor',* is actually problematic. It has been argued that the blending of metaphysical discourse and poststructuralist theory is highly complex, if not confusing (Kellner 2002).[47] These conceptual shifts do not stand alone but mirror a broader tendency of philosophic debating in academia, as

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[45] The utopian part can be labelled the *Scottian* type, after James Scott's *Weapons of the Weak*, the second assumes a more *Foucauldian* stance after Foucault's biopolitics. For a discussion about biopolitics and neo-liberalisms see Thomas Lemke 'The Birth of bio-politics': Michel Foucault's lecture at the College de France on neo-liberal governmentality.

[46] Fenton gives a good example of the relevance of dystopian critique in the *No Sweat Campaign* that initially directed its struggle to Nike Corporation and shows how they eventually become incorporated in the structures of capitalism.

[47] Kellner links this 'new politics' to earlier attempts by Laclau and Mouffle who valorised new social movements and radical democracy, without actually providing concrete proposals of struggle in new realities, i.e. leaving us with the idea that resistance is not really possible.

Eagleton also suggests in the opening quote of this section. However, Hardt and Negri's work inspired many activists and received a great deal of attention in academic debates concerning social movements/political protest, and are therefore important to examine. The reason I address this debate is that these changing class analyses are directly or indirectly linked to the assumed disappearance of nation-states or the role of economy vis-à-vis the state. A critical assessment of biopolitics and class relates to my later reference to online and offline resistance and protest.

Hardt and Negri's writings about political movements often generalize and thus move away from explaining everyday political agency. New interpretations of class, agency, and resistance tent to read as reifications and require clarity. According to Davis, complex metaphysical ideas that are reduced to impractical redefinitions (rather than concrete and comparative case studies) may also lead to demoralized analyses of collective class struggle and resistance. But, Davis continues, "Even within a single city, slum populations can support a bewildering variety of responses to structural neglect and deprivation, ranging from charismatic churches and prophetic cults to ethnic militias, street gangs, neo-liberal NGOs, and revolutionary social movements. But if there is no monolithic subject or unilateral trend to global slum, there are nonetheless myriad acts of resistance" (:201-202). Camfield examines Hardt and Negri's concept of *immaterial labour* and concludes that this central theme in their analyses cannot play the role Hardt and Negri assign to it. In fact, from an economic perspective; "This [Hardt and Negri] kind of theorizing is an enormous obstacle to understanding class as complex and heterogeneous formations" (Camfield (2006:14).

Camfield explains why the incorrect assessment by Hardt and Negri contributed to a tendency within critical academia to no longer accept material production and class as crucial; "Multitudes' suggestion that a certain type of labour has distinctive qualitative features by virtue of what it produces rather than because of a characteristic labour process or place in working class formation, seems a fetishistic methodological error" (Camfield 2006:10). This critique is significant as the socio-economic analysis plays a key role in Hardt and Negri's major claims. According to Camfield; "The importance of immaterial labour for Hardt and Negri's project in Multitude goes far beyond the manner in which it leads to a re-conceptualization of the critique of political-economy. Immaterial labour is the basis for the new global class formation which they call the multitude" (:7).[48] Thus Hardt and Negri's writings influenced the assessment of resistance potentials and they that immaterial labour is capable of realizing real democracy as the rule of *all by all* if one replaces *working class* with *multitude,* because the former is supposedly an 'exclusionary' concept.

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[48] In short the argument of Camfield is the following: inspired by Foucault's reference to biopolitical labour, Hardt and Negri's contention is that in the current era of economic postmodernization, *immaterial labour* represents material *and* immaterial production, as well as creates social life, and thus dissolves the separation between work and life. Their analyses dissolve the distinction between immaterial and material labour, they end up contradicting their initial definition of immaterial labour as labour that produces immaterial products (2006:3).

The problem is that, with such *de-classed* definitions, terms like 'marginality', 'locality', or 'difference', have become normalized as positive concepts and lost their critical meaning. Eagleton (2004) refutes the new fixation for *'the marginals'* as a replacement of working class; he asks, "What of the low-paid? The low-paid are not central, but neither are they marginal. It is they whose labour keeps the system up and running.(…) Marginal comes to mean Mexican or African-American, rather than in addition the people of Bangladesh or the former coalminers and shipbuilders of the West.(…) The true scandal of the present is that almost everyone in it is banished to the margins" (2004:19). Moreover, emphasising *the other* assume there are no major political-economic contradictions *within* the 'majorities' or 'locals' themselves.

Fenton presents an alternative to abstract/depoliticized analyses and argues for political efficacy with regards to the internet. We need more than just an increase in *mediated* protest: "Solidarity is crucial … the socio-political glue" (:14); social movements gain public legitimacy and political force through the embodiment of solidarity offline (:19). Thinking beyond a 'local' that is particularly mediated by electronic media, Fenton argues that a collective understanding of an 'end point' is necessary for the success of political projects. For this, Fenton deconstructs Zizek's remark that: "Maybe it is not possible, at least not in the foreseeable future to undermine the global capitalist system because we cannot imagine any alternative to it".[49] This has concrete relevance for internet politics because a key element is the presence of social "imageries", strengthened by the use of the internet. Social and political dynamics of protest and mobilization have changed and led to the *commoditization* of information and democracy within the realm of the media. This reconfiguring of space and resistance shows that mediating the message of protest is still not the protest itself; internet connectivity enabling transnational alliances between disparate groups can also lead to the fragmentation and disaggregation of these groups. Moreover, with the revitalization of protest movements since the 1999 Battle of Seattle, academic interest in communication and technology as a space of resistance developed as well. It is therefore important to associate the message, however evocative as a phenomenon in itself, to the (collective) understanding of a common endpoint/target of the (protest) movements present (Fenton:4).

The online spaces of resistance I refer to can be both formal and informal. James Scott (1985, 1990) in particular argued that political resistance is not only that which is visible (formal) but to be understood as part of informal and everyday life practices as well. Michel de' Certeau's focus on *practice* and his differentiation between *strategy* and *tactics* as pointed before, help avoid ascribing the same power to *means* as to *ends* of resistance *Strategies* can be the elites' technologies of ownership and control, while the *tactics* are the practices comprising non-elite everyday life. It is as if to say that the ruling ideas are often the ideas of the ruling class, but that the oppressed classes also possess 'tactical' means to counter-pose hegemonic representations. These everyday struggles are important in our analyses of resistance. While the logic of ruling

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[49] Zizek, 1999:352, in Fenton 2005:3.

class oppression (especially combined with state-power in the case of Israel), necessitates an approach that goes beyond 'multitude' or 'subaltern' organizing.

When I refer to political protest in the coming chapters, I view resistance as presenting covert and overt strategies; not in opposition but interrelated. Everyday life politics is not a weak extract of the 'staged' (formal) resistance; in that regard James Scot is very right. But neither is the local/everyday a representation of the pure/innocent soul of resistance. When referring to coping strategies of the oppressed, it sometimes happens that *survival* is confused with *resistance,* as Scheper-Hughes (1999) makes very clear. Gramsci's analyses prevent the entrapment of resistance into binary views. Many of his tropes (such as *hegemony*, *philosophy of praxis*, state vs. civil society, the role of intellectuals) have become common sense in International Relations, Cultural Studies, and other academic disciplines, albeit often selectively.[50] By continuously contributing to a deconstruction of resistance in a contextualized manner, Gramsci's dialectic understanding of power and hegemony go beyond the level of philosophy. Key is his attempt to understand why revolutions fail. By understanding hegemony as domination that advances by consent *and* coercion, he shows that political dominance is not merely a top-down process. Rather than believing that subordinate classes submissively accept political dominance, Gramsci considered *self-activity* the soul of resistance and a key element in revolutionary processes.[51] Gramsci argued for the presence of an independent organization for resistance, a party or organization that is not a substitute but rather, an organized body of oppressed classes.

Gramsci's contributions are relevant for the study of electronic media, the internet, and politics because they don't loose sight of the contradicting realities of capitalism and power. This analysis of grassroots collective politics includes larger political-economic frameworks and helps to understand how different levels of activism can be valued. Such a non-reductionist perspective shows how activists share political strategies or identities; understand the internal diversity involved; and also gives voice to those active 'backstage' of politics. The difference between *survival* and resistance is another important reminder for this study because Palestinian resistance involves different definitions/analyses and may simultaneously refer to grassroots activism, social movements, or insurrection and protest movements. Through Asef Bayat's work I view political struggle as an amalgam involving different degrees of survival/everyday resistance strategies. Without romanticizing resistance and while still emphasizing the elements of class and state in political resistance, Bayat showed how Iranians engage in everyday protest and counter hegemonic forces against the state (1997, 1998). Sometimes even the practice of survival contributes to the stamina

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[50] Most of Gramsci's writings are on http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/. For an important reassessment of Gramsci, see the classics; *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci* by Perry Anderson, New Left Review I/100, November-December 1976. http://newleftreview.org/?view=68); and Chris Harman *Gramsci versus Eurocommunism*, International Socialism no. 98, May 1977: http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=239.
[51] Gramsci's perception of contradictory consciousness is an expression of this dialectics; peoples' experience (impacted by concrete political/capitalist realities) during collective resistance shapes their sense of self-emancipation and also collective will.

of resistance. Bayat's notion of *accumulatively encroaching*: a combination of everyday survival and civil disobedience, was partly reflected in the 1970/80s phase of the Palestinian *Sumoud* (preservation/endurance), and still found in refugee camps.

These approaches help me understand that while there are differences in political internet use, the agents who engage in it are key, not (the intermediation of) technology itself. The internet can positively affect the organization of social movements and resistance. Besides forging alliances and coalitions across different movements, "similarly, the protest activity and alliances of social movements on the ground affects the internal organization of the internet (Fenton:7)." Fenton's reference to Escobar grasps exactly what needs to be said:

> This cybercultural politics can be most effective if it fulfils two conditions: awareness of the dominant worlds that are being created by the same technologies on which the progressive networks rely (including an awareness of how power works in the world of transnational networks and flows); and an ongoing tacking back and forth between cyberpolitics (political activism of the internet) and what I call place politics, or political activism in the physical locations at which the networker sits and lives.[52]

In light of the different *utopian/dystopian* views sketched above, global and local mobilizations through the internet altered political activism against Israeli occupation in many ways. Interestingly, the forced mobility also led to successful Palestinian expatriates in the diaspora as discussed at the outset of this chapter. Some played a crucial role as investors and developers of the ICT sector. In the next and final part of this chapter I offer insight in the status of Palestinian internet and *situate* the practices of internet use in three fieldwork research sites.

2.3 Materiality of Palestinian Internet: Situating Palestinian ICT

The first ICT initiatives were set-up by Palestinian expatriates that returned to Palestine; these *returnees* formed a core of technology developers. A Palestinian IT specialists group (ITSIG) was established to influence and promote the development of IT in Palestine and they had to deal with many challenges. At the start of this research in 2001, the internet hype still coincided with utopian ideas of a new globalized world with 'virtual reality' as a new alternative. However, as outlined in Chapter One, to unveil the complex logic of the internet I follow a dialectic understanding of internet potentials, and a double-edged (quantitative and qualitative) methodology. Contrary to perspective on the internet as a *natural* phenomenon, a further assessment of ICT in this section will confirm that political-economic forces shape the internet for commercial, military, and political motivations. The triumphal neo-liberalism and the advent of the 'New World Order' in the early 1990s

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[52] Escobar 1999:32 in Fenton 2005:15

contributed to a *crisis of conscience* within social science (Franklin 2001:20). This shift strengthened crises of national identification and indeed also affected general intellectual inputs (Eagleton 2004). As for the economic crises, the IT sector experienced the most dramatic consequences. Neither utopian free market policies nor intellectual streams could prevent one of the nastiest economic crashes to occur. At the end of the twentieth century, merely a decade after the neo-liberal triumph, many corporate scandals were uncovered. Brenner (2003) recalls:

> The revelation of WorldCom's fraud shook the market because it became perfectly clear that what had appeared to be one of the most successful companies in the telecom business had made no profits in either 2000 or 2001 (and not quite in 1998 1999 either). WorldCom, as one analyst told Fortune in July 2002, 'seemed to have some kind of secret formula for producing decent margins where rivals couldn't': when this formula was understood, the last bit of air went out of the telecom bubble. (…) The bust, when it came, thus proceeded from the dotcoms, via the telecom carriers, to the equipment suppliers and their component makers.

The OECD showed that only 37 internet companies of a 242 sample, made profits in the third quarter of 1999, with just two of them accounting for 60 percent of the total amount. For the 168 companies, losses in that quarter exploded to 12.5 billion US dollar. The bursting of the internet bubble was the catalyst for the collapse of telecom industries that began in 2000 with a seemingly endless cycle of disastrous reports. Because telecom accounted for a disproportionate share of capital accumulation, the impact of its collapse was immense. (Brenner 2003). The IT bubble snapped and the reality behind the fantasies and promotions appeared to be a rude kind of capitalism. Instead of a positive trickle down effect, 'digital divide'/'virtual imperialism' reared its head as ugly symptoms. This critical analysis is particularly important in relation to the materiality of Palestinian internet. And beside the general criticism of the free ICT promises, the fact is that Palestinians could not access the actual internet backbone when it wanted. The colonial logic dictated that Palestinian ISP services must go through Israeli providers.

During the mid 1990s IT development became a fact in Palestine. Yet, for a thorough 'reading' of the Palestinian internet setting and to understand the relevance, expectations and processes of ICT development, hard data are needed. This final part of the chapter will be devoted to map the technological transformation of Palestinian internet through a local and global lens. After a history of ICT in Palestine and a short study of the internet in Jordan and Lebanon, I will close this section with an assessment of Palestinian internet, thus scrutinizing the relative internet penetration rates. This *re*assessment will answer the question of how access to the internet is embedded in the context of occupation.

"Need is the mother of Invention": Internet access, Occupation, and Diaspora

As stated, the internet really came to life with the return of many Palestinian ICT specialists, intellectuals, and investors after Oslo (peace agreements of 1993).[53] The returnees brought back skills, knowledge, and money that soon developed the IT sector to a professional level. Palestinian internet changed from a context of direct occupation where faxes were illegal, lease lines were not allowed, phone lines had a 10 year waiting list, major universities were closed, and where there was no capital… to setting up international IT companies and an increasing Palestinian diaspora 'tapping home'. While many intellectuals and university professionals were denied travel permissions to attend conferences and universities abroad, some found academic freedom through cyberspace. Thus Bahour's statement, "al-haja 'um al-ikhtira'" [need is the mother of invention] during an interview in 2003, captures what ICT in Palestine basically means.

Due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, international telephone lines between Palestine and most of the Arab world were closed for 23 years. From 1967 till the Oslo agreement international phone connection from Palestine was unavailable.[54] Israeli telecom was never quick to service Palestinian users in the occupied territories. A military order (1279) from June 1989 during the first Intifada even made it an offence for Palestinians to use telephone lines for sending faxes, electronic mail, or any other electronic transmissions, this at a period when contact with the outside world was critical (Parry 1997). With Oslo, the status of telephone networks underwent important changes and ICT[55] became one of the fastest growing areas of development (Bahour 1998). Despite the fact that reliance on Israel remained a problem, Oslo did transfer some of the civil responsibilities from Israel to the PNA (Palestinian National Authority). One of these was the telecom sector, which before Oslo was labelled a 'security sector' under Israeli military civil administration. Basically, the only involvement of Palestinians in the telecom field was through Palestinian employees doing the low paid/dirty work Israelis could not do in Palestinian neighbourhoods.

The agreements led to the emergence of immense network infrastructures and made fast amounts of information available while the evolution in computer technology produced computers at more affordable prices adding to the broader ICT penetration. The PNA got control over the telephone networks in the autonomous PNA (A) areas.[56] This limited autonomy did not grant Palestinians a structural base

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[53] This was also possible because the Palestinian diaspora consists of a relatively high level of educated classes abroad.

[54] According to many interviewees, available telephone lines also serve as a source of intelligence for military authority.

[55] ICT refers to a broad variety of new/media; video, software, networks and internet technologies.

[56] At the time, Area A contained 95% of the Palestinian population and represents approximately 3% of the land area of the Gaza strip and West Bank. Area A and B (shared control) were geographically fragmented by the larger C area under full Israeli control, thus Palestinian telephone networks still remained an integral

for developing a fully independent network infrastructure. However, the newly inaugurated PNA immediately privatized the Telecom sector. Some of the major Palestinian capitalists were recruited and promised that if they invest, they would be given a monopoly license. The investors negotiated a license with the PNA, which was received symbolically on November 15 (Palestinian Independence Day) 1996. On January 1997 the sector was transferred from the PA to the private company PalTel. After 36 years, the entire scope of telecom fell in the lap of the PNA. Sam Bahour recalls the new challenges during an interview;

> Our initial staffing was recruiting people from the Palestinian diaspora. Yet, the political constraints do not allow us to do our job properly. Many Palestinians would love to come back but the immigration policy is still in Israel's hands. I am still here on a tourist visa for the last seven years. Even with all the experience from outside none of us was capable of building a total new telecommunications system from scratch. Plan B was to bring management expertise from outside, by British Telecom.

However, as Bahour described elsewhere (1998), privatization did not mean service improvement or lower costs, as usually propagated by free-market ideologues.

Simultaneously, private investors such as PalNet had set-up Internet Service Provider's (ISPs) and were offering internet services even before PalTel coordinated the infrastructure, as it was still working formally under occupation regulations. Their status was awkward because they were licensed by the Israeli civil administration, and tapping from Israeli IT companies. Thus, when the PA was installed after Oslo and PalTel was given telecom/infrastructure monopoly, the status of ISP companies like PalNet with license to roam via Israeli providers into the OT was unclear. While all previous network linkages went through Israeli territory, PalTel covered the occupied Palestinian territories with a data communication network 'blanket'.[57] The relationship with PalNet was confusing but it soon it became clear that ultimately, all providers (including PalTel) buy their internet lines through Israeli companies like Bezeq. So basically, there was no fully self-controlled territorially-based technological infrastructure. The 'occupied state' had to tap from its occupier in order to provide connection for what is still referred to as an independent communication infrastructure. It confirms that Palestinians were never offered real independence via Oslo; their fate was already sealed in the Oslo agreements that Palestinian representatives had signed:

> Why we signed this, is a political discussion, but also the incompetence of negotiations: politicians did technical negotiations. Basically, the Telecom Section of the Oslo agreement (art. 36) is a disaster for us while there's a lot in it for the Israelis. It's a captive market and they are benefiting from the existing structures. And for security purposes: everything comes

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part of the Israeli telephone network. Since the Al Aqaa Intifada these area divisions don't really mean much as all is under military control.

[57] Yet, some Palestinian cities were still interlinked with Israeli connection, mainly because of the Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory.

through one Israeli line so they can monitor the Palestinian internet. We have very expensive equipment but no way to connect to the outside world. It is therefore an interesting question why they didn't cut the internet while they destroyed houses, cities, arrested 7000 people… It takes them three minutes to cut off the data communication lines in the entire West Bank and Gaza, perhaps the political vacuum would be too dangerous.

The last part of Bahour's quote is quite significant in pondering why Israel still controlled Palestinian ICT. Political (monitoring Palestinians) and economic (Palestinians pay for telecom through Israeli companies) self-interest were the most common explanations given during interviews with ICT professionals. Confirming Israeli interference in the telecom sector, Palestinian landline customers received their bills and costumer service from the Israeli company Bezeq. The Palestinian ICT phenomenon confirms that an 'artificial' peace sparked the uprising because many of the peaceful agreements led to further lack of Palestinian independence. And it led to great disappointment, as Sabri Saidam, coordinator of the Internet Society, Palestine chapter, told me during an interview in Gaza in 2002:

> To be dependent on Israeli telecom (Bezeq) was beyond thought of every individual Palestinian. Sadly we signed an unfortunate deal, though we are already dependent on the Israeli market in fact.

Considering Palestinian dependency and subordination, how can we talk of Palestinian ICT development, especially when we take into account other general setbacks? Interviews with internet companies and internet cafes showed that the situation was extremely bleak between 2001 and 2005. Damage to the Palestinian economy was immense and unemployment rates went up to 70%, while 60% of the population lives in poverty.[58] Marketing local goods is hard due to roadblocks and closures. Thus, when discussing the internet place in Palestinian society, the impact of the occupation needs to be addressed. Many companies lost their feasibilities (and their employees). Those who were able searched for employment in the Gulf or Canada. The political context forced industries to adjust their organizational structure. Interviews showed that Palestinian society was in an experimenting phase of coping with the situation. In the words of the manager at PalNet:

> Palestinians are the most adaptable people in the world. See how inventive taxi drivers are even with closures, or how checkpoints became places where people can hire luggage carriage, buy ice cream, coffee, bread…A lot of businesses move into areas where it is easier to work. Not only internet cafes, we are also an example. We transferred our office to the other side [near the B and C areas] in order to stay viable. People and businesses are shifting all the time. Now we have a 24-hour support department, and 6 technicians sleep in the company because the curfews make it impossible to do otherwise.

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[58] See the reports for West Bank and Gaza between 2002 and 2004 on http://www.worldbank.org/.

In other words, Palestinians developed a 'survival economy'. The industries grew despite the circumstances of service-oriented industries because they did not directly rely on mobility or geographic boundaries (Tarazi 2001).

As pointed out earlier, if we compare the second Intifada with the previous one (1987-1991), the new and important component is the ability to immediately send out news through the internet – an indispensable information infrastructure. The harsher the Israeli oppression became, the more extensive the Intifada became. Internet use was therefore influenced by on-the-ground realities and vice versa (though not at the same level). Palestinian/pro-Palestinian viewpoints became more audible; politics and infrastructure infused one another. The first significant use of the internet was the increase of email, and all together hundreds of websites were produced (See Chapter Five). Both technological infrastructure and increasing political conflict sharpened the contradictions, and even led to a direct clash. To understand this 'clash' it is important to further outline the colonial relationship between Palestine and Israel.

On July 15 2002, Israel's attack on the ISP PalNet, which concluded with the arrest of six staff workers and deportation of one employee, reflects the Israeli government's frustration. Their problem, namely, is that cyberspace is not occupied territory, and thus cannot be sealed by Israeli tanks and checkpoints anywhere and anytime. The army sometimes 'disciplines' Palestinians into submission, with attacks such as this on PalNet, or by monitoring through their monopoly of the technological infrastructure, such as Bahour hinted at before. The Israeli domination over Radio Frequency Spectrum prevents the PNA from controlling telecommunication resources. Israeli companies allow their telecommunications to be broadcasted illegally over Palestinian territories; they control over 50% of the mobile market. Telecom services in Palestine are relatively expensive because PalTel has to purchase its service from Israel and resell in Palestine. As a result, Israel provides telecom services to its users for one third of the cost of services provided to Palestinians.[59] On the other hand, Israel is one of the top countries in IT development, giving Palestinians easy accessibility to (copied) software. As many Palestinians have friends and family inside Israel, access to technology becomes easier. It is therefore relevant to study Israeli ICT, also since Jordan and Lebanon are Israel's neighbouring countries.

Israel built a highly competitive high-tech industry and developed its ICT technology in the shadow of war. Military investment consumes most of the government spending and the army is the countries' premier incubator. Perhaps because Israel's general level of education ranks close to the bottom in mathematics and science, Israeli high-tech was built by expatriates and the ability to tap from Jewish investment bankers in Wall Street which opened a line to the US capital market (Escwa 2002). Not surprisingly, ICT was also founded by unemployed army specialists and returned expatriates from Silicon Valley. In 2000, venture capitalist (VC)

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[59] International Telecommunication Union, The World Summit for Information Community, Palestine participation, www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsis/c/S03-WSIS-C-0007!!MSW-A.doc.

investments accounts for 0.99% of the Israeli GDP, second to US investment levels and three times that of Europe. Israel became the international centre for software development and hosts some of the largest computer and research and development (R&D) companies like Microsoft and Intel.

In 2004, PalTel marketed its new service offering direct access to the internet, bypassing ISP providers. An unfair competition follows from PalTel's special monopoly status that it inherited from the Oslo era. This monopoly status meant that Paltel represented the main technological backbone in the OT.[60] Thus all ISPs have to go through Paltel, and considering Paltel's dependency on Israeli providers, this eventually comes down to Palestinian ISPs reselling from Israeli ISPs.[61] The technological dependency on Israel (also in political terms) has significant consequences for Palestine. When Israel deployed from the Gaza Strip in September 2005 the Army destroyed the phone lines, cut the main connection line between the North and South of Gaza, and dumped rubble on the central part of the line (Saidam 2006). In the Palestinian context, the internet does more than relate to 'flows of spaces'; it transforms flows of places and territory through IT company buildings, cable lines, internet cafes, and ICT community centres. These new offline places symbolize the expansion of physical networks as meeting points, while they become new military targets. An interesting addition to the offline settings became the Palestinian juxtaposition in virtual place and space (Chapter Three). A study of the penetration rates/internet access in this regard is therefore crucial.

Internet Penetration

Since the internet became accessible and more Palestinians got online, the discussion erupted about the number of Palestinian internet users and the ability to rate internet penetration. In 2000, major ISP PalNet started investigating internet usage in Palestine and came up with the first numbers through the following calculation: 26.000 households with internet connection with an estimated 40.000 private internet users (from what I witnessed this was a low estimate because households extended families and neighbours play an important role in daily household life). Furthermore, some of the large institutes linked up students and employees with PalNet -such as Birzeit University (Ramallah/WB), al-Azhar University and Islamic university (Gaza), and together with several big NGO's they counted for another 20.000 users. Finally, commercial retailers such as Internet Cafés and communication-advertising companies, with a 24-hour lease line, provided internet to approximately 60.000 (indirect) clients. At the time, PalNet covered approximately 65% of the ISP market; this would have made the total number of the internet users in Palestine

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[60] Laila El-Haddad, Free internet in Palestine could have negative impact on Local ISPs. Daily Star Lebanon 16 December 2003
[61] The Paltel monopoly in telecommunication did not last forever. In 2006 the Minister of Telecom, Jamal El Khodaryof the Hamas government, granted another license for Mobile phone services to the Kuweity Al Watania company.

approximately 150.000; a rough total (individual/home and public) penetration rate of 3 per cent.[62]

Table 2: Percentage Distribution (member of) Household that use Internet by Period of Time.[63]

Period of Time	Palestinian Territory
Less Than One Month	84.9
2 – 3 Months	76.2
4 – 6 Months	65.5
7 – 12 Months	58.9
Before One Year	52.7

ISP's later registered an exponential growth in internet penetration: from 3 per cent in 2000 to 8 per cent in November 2002. In 2004, PCBS measured a home penetration rate of 9.2 percent and approximately 35 per cent total penetration. And by February 2004 PalTel had introduced a new system of direct internet access through a special four-digit number. Bypassing the traditional ISPs, users would now only pay the local phone costs.[64] In other words, the internet changed from being a selective service since early 2000 to a retail product as the establishment of PalTel, the emergence of more ISP's, the introduction of IT facilities through public and educational institutes, pre-paid internet cards, internet subscription, and the mushrooming IC's witness. To the surprise of many, political instability did not negatively influence internet interests.

Considering the economic catastrophe and continued colonial suffering, the Palestinian technological evolution seemed to make another leap forward. A good illustration is the change in prices of one of the researched Internet Cafes. *AL Carma* in Ramallah was one of the first and successful ICs in Palestine. Until 1998, internet users were mostly a selected group of people. *Al Carma* dropped prices from NIS 25 (5 US $) an hour, to 12 NIS, and eventually NIS 4 an hour (less then 1 US $). Instead of the 25 costumers in 1998, they had 200-300 costumers a day in 2001, and even more in 2002. Where it used to be a luxury, internet has also become a necessity for Palestinians that want to do business on a national level.

A genuine increase of internet usage requires better connectivity, better penetration, cheap equipment, accessible services, as well as social programs that can relate to the differences between Palestinian localities inside Palestine. Research about ICT development in Palestine was mainly carried out in the West Bank, the

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[62] Other ISPs I asked generally agreed with the outcome of these calculations. The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) was not capable of conducting extensive research at the time.

[63] PCBS survey for 2004, www.pcbs.org (Waked 2005:20).

[64] The same initiative in Egypt clearly increased the internet use. From *Free Internet in Palestine could have negative impact on local ISPs* Daily Star 16-12-2003 M El Haddad. In a statement the Palestinian ISPs declared to consider this move by PalTel unfair competition.

Palestinian political-economic 'centre'. Additional fieldwork in Gaza revealed particular social-political differences and similarities. During interviews, I heard that IT producers in Gaza had to work harder than in the West Bank to encourage internet use. The earliest penetration rate estimations suggested these differences as well.

When deconstructing the absolute penetration rate by splitting the level of usage and frequency in usage, in Table 2 we can see that 84.9 percent of internet subscribers regularly use the internet. it also shows that a small number of subscribers are not regular users, even though they have internet at home. This might be explained by the fact that many internet subscribers are also connected to the net at work, university, or other public places.

Table 3: Ownership ICT Indicators in West Bank/Gaza 2004

Indicators	Percent
Household Ownership of Land-line Phones	39
Individual Ownership of Cell Phones	32
Household Ownership of Computers	29
Households with Modems	13
Households with Printers	23
Households with Scanner	17
Household Subscription to the Internet	10
Internet Users from anywhere	35
Household Members with Web Sites	5
Households with Digital Camera	12

InTable 3, we see a general illustration of household and individual ICT ownership, including hardware such as modems and printers. The figures show a clear difference between private and public access rates (Zureik 2005c:6). The number of households with internet is much lower than the number of households with computers or telephone landlines. In other words, a large section of the population can be considered potential internet users.[65]

Table 4 shows that the average West Bank basic ICT indicators, such as ownership of computer, telephone, and the internet, is higher than in Gaza. However, a closer look also shows that the differences are not that great and that the gap between the West Bank and Gaza was decreasing. This difference is even more relative when taking economic status into consideration. Abu Marzouk, the owner of the first ISP Company of Gaza, *Palestine Internet Services*, started in 1999 with his business when he returned to Palestine in 1998.

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[65] And these numbers continue to grow, a survey from august 2005 shows 13.1 percent home connection (Zureik 2005c:9).
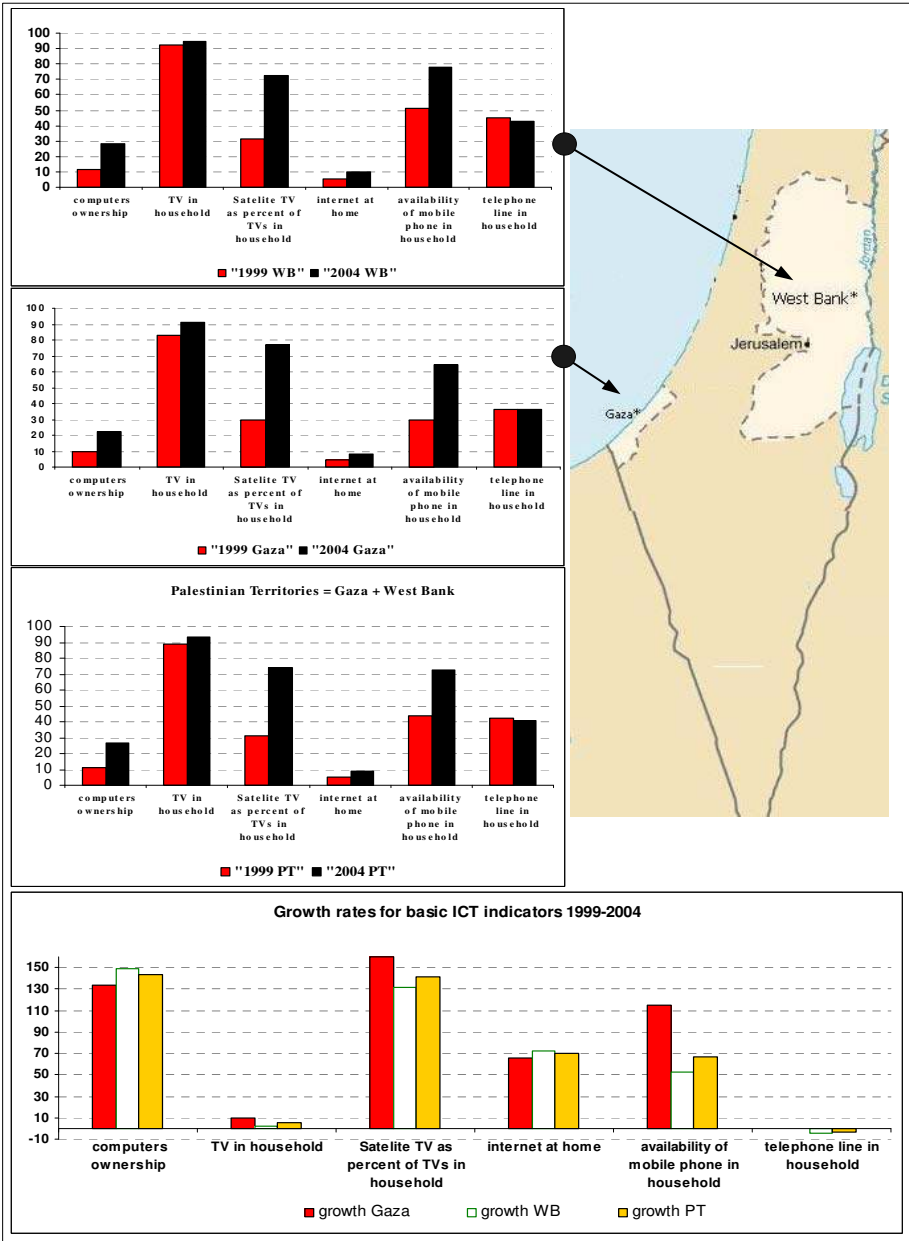
Table 4: ICT indicators & growth rates Palestinian Households 1999-2004[66]

Abu Marzouk discovered there was no local internet server available in Gaza and started offering wireless broadband connection. The main problems were the high prices due to dial-up and installation costs. He explains the choice to use the internet regardless of the higher costs, as follows:

> The first six months (of the Intifada) aw an extensive growth because people were stuck at home, bored and frustrated. Then the economic crises hit. But the internet also became the only source of accurate news, and of chatting, which is very important because people needed more means of communication "to talk".

By 2002, Gaza had two more local based ISP's with the same internet service quality as in the West Bank. Despite Gaza being one of the poorest places in Palestine, it saw an increase in internet connectivity; internet connection at home almost doubled. Yet, in Gaza too—in the face of a devastating economic situation—internet consumption was growing because people needed it more than ever.

PIS was also the first company in Palestine to develop ready to use 'credit' cards that were sold in shops and used for home connection. Palestinian internet without the impact of occupation would have seen a different development. For example, IT hardware cannot be repaired or renewed because Israeli import restricted goods for the Palestinian IT sector. Israel was clearly breaking international agreements such as the Paris Economic Protocol, but measures were not taken.[67] Thus, even though the Intifada infused internet usage, it could have been better. For Sabri Saidam, leading the ISOC-Palestine chapter and living in Gaza at the time:

> Had we been given political tranquillity and some grounds for elevation, internet in Palestine would have been rocketing sky high. Even after 2 years of oppression and repression, Palestinian society met the internet and expressed interest in communication as a whole, as well as gave an international touch to their lives.

Jordan

In late 1995, the National Information Centre began to give licenses to educational institutions for internet access, and since 1996 Jordanians could obtain local internet access. Upon the request of King Abdullah in 1999, The Internet Technology Association of Jordan (Intaj) was set up and presented the REACH initiative, aiming to define and study the IT sector. Realistically speaking, Jordan took these measures to attract investors and the country received backing from leading global IT companies. Several more reasons contributed to the relative success of the internet in Jordan aside from this general top-down push including its human resource of educated youth comprised of many diaspora graduates with technical skills. Many returnees (of whom many were Palestinian by origin) played a prominent role in the

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[67] Intaj, February 20, 2002. At www.intaj.net/news/readnews.cfm?id=335

development of ICT as well. In Palestine the Oslo 'peace' process was the defining factor of returnees; in Jordan the impact of the Gulf War and expulsion of Palestinians (from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) made them the pioneers of the field.

Public internet access was soon a fact. The internet company Global One offered private service at 6.5 JD (US$ 8) per hour when the first public internet connections were presented. In 1997 Nets offered basic internet access service and became the first Jordanian ISP to offer unlimited internet service for 110 JD (US$) per month (and prices dropped to 45 JD a month, still very expensive). FirstNet also started offering internet, at 1.75 JD per hour and 50 JD a month. Individuals and organizations could establish internet accounts/websites without an official government approval or registration. Yet these high phone/internet access costs kept the number of users relatively low. In 2004, the government sold its shares to France Telecom, the end of JT's monopoly was supposed to improve IT access and quality. The initially enthusiastic prospects of foreign investment policy did not improve local markers because French Telecom had its own profit in mind. However, rapid developments and government privileges led Jordan to stand amongst the best Arab countries in the ICT field (Open Arab Initiative 2006:13). Due to these and other factors Jordan is ahead of many Arab countries with similar political/economic structures. The data communications (infrastructure) services were handed over to private companies in the early phase. Here too, returnees provided the boost after the

During an interview with a Reach coordinator I understood that internet penetration figures from the Telecom Regulatory Commission were based on 70.000 home subscribers multiplied by either 2.5 users or 4 users. The first is an average and the last a positive estimation. This revealed approximately 250.000 internet users in a population of 5.2 million in 2002 (les then 5%). Before the growing availability of mass media like the internet and satellite technologies, marginal communities (refugees and women) had little access to public spaces; they were often subject to the regulations and rules of the state or family. Satellite televiosion and internet has an impact on the political and social structure because it provides information and new methods of entertainment, and alters existing patterns of interaction between individuals and/or groups. As explained in the context of Palestine, internet development is positively linked to education. Universities were the first large settings with internet availability to Jordanians. In the city of Irbid, hosting Irbid University and Yarmouk University, the main street (opposite the university entrance) hosted the world's largest number of IC's on one street.[68]

As internet use grew rapidly in the whole of Jordan the authorities had to tolerate news and comments online although they continued to regulate print and broadcast media; Jordanians were able to obtain information from the internet that is either prohibited or ignored in the local print press. Intaj coordinated the input of internet penetration through the Jordan Internet Community Centre (JITCC)

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[68] Many articles in the press were devoted to this issue when the Guinness Book of Records mentioned Irbid has the street with most internet cafes in the world.

initiative. Individuals all over Jordan participated in the projects; girls benefited more in terms of a percentage attendance rated at 67%. According to Palestinian-Jordanian Yousef working at JITCC: "We have hired female trainers and this made a difference. Especially in Jordanian Bedouin villages where women are not allowed to participate in many things." The centres were more accepting because of the connotation to 'education'.

> So far in 2 years we trained 30.000 Jordanians on computer courses. We have 75 centres by now, 20 started just 4 months ago. Nice thing about those centres you go in find 9 year old behind pc and 50 year old next to him. Many are illiterate, but I talk about computer literacy, they don't necessarily know how to write but how to type.

Only 8 centres had a website but JITCC prepared a web template for all centres with a manual and trained the trainers to know how to use the templates and other software. All trainers are computer/science graduates, participate in workshops like web-design, and must be from the community. "If we don't find a BA graduate we take a diploma (college) graduate". The discussion forums of the JITCC sites were not active and people seemed restrained. "I notice that even trainers find it hard to regularly email us. It is a social problem I think, they look up to us and maybe sometimes feel intimidated." One coordinator therefore made a big *Mansaf* (Jordanian dish) and gathered families to tell them what the centres are for. He used traditional tactics to introduce modern techniques. Several interviewees mentioned that as a consequence of Jordan's strict involvement in the refugee camps, Palestinian camps are treated according to Jordanian policy and thus can appeal to the same services as other Jordanians. JITCC than also included refugee camps in its national target of the REACH initiative. I was told about these challenges during an interview with Samer in Amman, also a Palestinian-Jordanian.

Samer coordinated the REACH initiative at Intaj and was involved with the implementation of IT related projects:

> Camps are over-populated and have problems; whenever there are regulations from government they go crazy. Some centres I visited in camps are working really well because are cheaper than the private centres. We don't make a difference; refugee camps are just as well part of Jordanian community. But there is a difference in theory and practice, as a Palestinian I know that too.

JITCC centres were opened in refugee camps al-Naser and al-Hussein near Amman, and Jarash refugee camp near Jarash city. It was very promising and I have seen bright examples, though, while on a fieldwork trip to one of the JITCC villages I discovered the centre was closed and the computer facilities looked rather neglected. The general coordinator later told me that, after the launch of the project it is eventually the responsibility of the community to organize the grassroots projects. But then the success was still JITCC responsibility.

In some centres, JITCC can monitor the websites people visit via with a cash engine connected to the server. During an interview in July 2003, Yousef said that the servers "catch all the sites they visit and we have remote access to it. No, we don't mean to monitor them, even if we see something abnormal we don't tell them." Yousef had several discussions with the project manager about the regulations:

> They had this principle of only use it for learning. I myself liked computers and internet because I started with the games etc. later on chatting. It shouldn't be only for learning, I'd feel stupid to go there.

These general developments were the contexts in which the internet spearheaded in Jordan. In Chapter Five and Six I will look at the specific development of internet cafes and websites. In fact, language was important for internet participation; Arabic interfaces and web-design layout were motivating factors, and personal chat and email in Arabic even more so. It is important to be able to choose between different languages , as people don't only use Western internet tools.[69] "If the internet will be spread on the masses, language should be redirected" said Sameeh Toqan. And so the Maktoob website was born in 1998 as an experimental project to offer Arabic email. The advantage meant that even interface language during browsing could be offered in Arabic. Its success became apparent when the number of users doubled every month after its inception at 5000 users. The site grew into a complete portal with entertainment, music, communication, news, and more, with three million subscribers by 2003. Yet Lebanon was the trendsetter in Arabizing the internet in its earliest stages.

Lebanon

The internet needed to overcome many difficulties in post-war Lebanon. The problems were directly related to a basic infrastructure destroyed by the Israeli invasions in the 1980s, and the consequent civil war that lasted until 1991.[70] Although the wars were exacting a toll on general develop, Lebanon is considered the regions' most liberal and market-oriented country. Lebanon has the largest market for personal computers of the Levant (I,e. Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, all bordering Palestine-Israel) with 38% of the 222.223 PCs to be shipped to the region,[71] The relatively higher price of branded PCs means that 85% of the people buy locally assembled

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[69] In Jordan for example, the use of English as a language is more common than other Arab countries as statistics about the interface language choices show. Around 30% of the people in Jordan choose Arabic while in SA this can go up to 90%.

[70] The war is never really over; the newly built power station was bombed in 1999 by Israel, which meant that access to electricity was still not guaranteed, and there were more bombings again in the summer of 2006.

[71] Dania Saadi, 1/16/2004 Daily Start "Lebanon tops Levant PC sales".

PCs.[72] Like in Jordan and Palestine, expatriate Lebanese professionals, above all those who were trained abroad, set up many of the ICT initiative frameworks.[73]

Different explanations can be given about Lebanon's relative success: free-market/neo-liberal policy, higher level of economic development, and a strong history of migration to industrialized countries. One of the important social factors is the strong and liberal character of the Lebanese press, which has not been undermined by 25 years of civil war. This climate influences a positive attitude towards the internet by the Lebanese government.[74] Lebanon therefore stands out for its technological transformation abilities that influence the production of information in Arabic. At the core of this success is the combination of Lebanon's superior regional media network (especially print journalism) with limited censorship and government control. Despite damage to the technical infrastructure during the wars, in early 1990s Lebanon became one of the first Arab countries to embrace the internet when Lebanon's daily newspapers (like al-Nahar and al-Safir) were amongst the first to be put online.

Initially the average cost of internet access was between US$ 63,- and US$ 73,- per month—relatively high since it equals at least 10% of an average monthly salary (ESWA 2003:7). At the end of 2002 the average monthly cost of internet subscription was between US$ 18,- and US$ 20,-. In mid 2003, 5 dominant ISPs were operating in Lebanon: Cyberia, Destination, IDM, Fiberlink Networks (Lynx), and Terranet. Other, local, internet service distributors offered 24/7 internet connection through aerial cable networks as well, though these were considered illegal since they bypassed fixed line networks and were recently (repeatedly) closed by the Ministry of Telecommunications. In 2002, Lebanon reached an 8% internet penetration. With the introduction of the 4-digit fixed rate the state finally succeeded in lowering the cost of dial up connection. Lebanon was the only Arab country that did not use ADSL service; to increase the internet penetration the ministry assigned ISPs to provide ADSL in 2006 (Idem). Many internet cafes in Beirut sprouted in the centre of town and around the universities. At the time of research (2003/04) prices varied between 1500-3000 LL (1-2 US$) per hour. But in the sha'bi (working class/'popular') areas like South Beirut's Dahia, Mreizhe, or Haret Hreik, near the main refugee camps, there were even more ICs and they were usually cheaper - approximately 1000-2000 LL (1 US$) per hour.

This broader context also shaped the logic of ICT production in refugee camps. People can be introduced to the internet in several ways such as school and work, radio and billboards, and even television campaigns. Weekly articles in leading newspapers focus on the internet and its impact, while television airs internet related interviews and discussion programs for audiences based in Lebanon. I followed the

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[72] Technological Development in the Arab World, Current and Future Trends. 2002. In the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) report

[73] According to Gonzales (2001), many entrepreneurs left after disappointed by the current instabilities, infrastructural problems, and corruption.

[74] This was manifested in the Economist International Union ranking Lebanon number 1 in the Middle East based on monitoring the political and civil freedoms. See also note 9.

Daily Star's Web Watch section where new or interesting websites were spotted and described. There were references to the Israeli/Palestine conflict and refugees on independent online magazines such as Amin.org and *Palestine Remembered*. Freedom of press and publication are important components of Lebanese society.

However, the availability of internet sources immediately raises questions in relation to internet accessibility. Access and infrastructure guide us in assessing ICT and internet penetration in the Arab world. Moreover, interviews in Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon seemed to show that the Arab ICT market benefited from its late and slow start: this paradox meant the ability to escape the general economic crises of the dot.com economy. This demands a critical assessment of Palestinian internet development.

How to Assess Palestinian ICT?

The materiality of ICT shapes Palestinian internet consumption and production. Critical analyses of (virtual) internet participation therefore needs to be linked to political economic structures and everyday realities. Internet holds great potential for Palestinians because their mobility (as well as means of communication such as landlines for telephones) is very much determined by external forces. Yet, it is important to situate the internet's infrastructural developments in Palestine within broader regional developments. The Palestinian historical contexts are not only relevant, but also necessary. In early assumptions the reader is mostly left with a depressive outlook. The Arab region is characterized as having great problems with the development of internet technologies because of restrictive media policies and lack of acceptance of 'new' media by state authorities (Kircher 2001:137). Generalizing the Arab world/Middle East can lead to essentialism and we therefore need to analyze people and communities within their complex context. Fast (and contradicting) technological developments also necessitate a continual update of data. Moreover, Kircher's analysis of internet obstacles in the Middle East is mostly a review of the state of affairs 10 years ago, while much has changed since. As Kircher also states, the level of technological development is not homogenous but individual countries differ in terms of education, economy (2001:141) and we may add politics.

From its start, Palestine (the currently occupied PNA areas) had a relatively high participation in economic and commercial ICT development and the PNA played a motivating factor. As sketched above, PalTel performed well in constructing a modern, high-performance infrastructure. This is even more impressive given the difficult circumstances (i.e. working under occupation and constant uprisings) in which PalTel had to operate. Thus a contextualised analysis is important in order to counter easy denouncements of ICT in the Arab world. Especially when conclusions are based on premature research. The way RAND referred to ICT in the Arab World through people's assumed *willingness* to *develop* is probleamtic for instance (2003

RAND research).[75] Contrary to the assumption that all countries are the same, comparing countries like Syria or Saudi Arabia with Palestine reveals many differences, especially when considering the effects of occupation, as RAND fails to in its assessment.

At the time of the first fieldwork in 2002-2003, there was no official register of internet usage by the entire Palestinian diaspora.[76] But from 1999, telecommunication certainly became part of Palestine's intellectual, professional, and personal life. Before Oslo, Bezeq, the main Israeli telecom provider, rarely connected local Palestinians: a seven-year waiting list used to be normal, while there was always the risk of phone taps. And before the Oslo Agreement in 1993, international phone connection between Palestine and the Arab world was not even available. I have explained that telecommunication became a 'subject of negotiation' and Palestine Telecommunications Company (PalTel) was the first to experiment after the negotiation deals were cut. Looking back, there were actually small revolutionary leaps as the section before illustrates. The moment Palestinians were able to control (parts of) the technological infrastructure, 250.000 households and professionals were on waiting lists for telephone lines. PalTel quickly realized a zero-waiting list, which eventually also allowed ISPs to provide internet connection. In 2002, more than 12 private ISP companies in Palestine were able to optimise the infrastructure and expand the business.

Thus, when we assess Palestinian internet use we have to emphasize that it is a *relative* assessment. It is therefore important to ask *how* policy makers interpret the simple statistic that internet users in Palestine reached 10 per cent home and 35 per cent general connectivity in 2004 (see Table 3). Hence, as Waked (2005:10) states:

> A desire to know how these figures compare to those of other similar countries will almost certainly arise from knowing the extent of the diffusion. The Palestinian internet diffusion rate would resonate differently if one notes, for example, that this 11.2 percent is larger than in many other Arab countries with comparable incomes. When evaluated against Palestine's relative economic performance in the last four years—a period which saw ICT defuse rapidly in Palestine concurrently with a pervasive economic collapse and a rapid upsurge in poverty—this relatively high diffusion level stands out even more.

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[75] The researchers claim that one of the general setbacks for a strong ICT culture is that: "non of the regions governments, excepting Israel and Turkey, has been installed as the result of what the United States [sic] considers "free and fair" elections. To the extent that they lack legitimacy to varying degrees, these governments maintain strong central control over most aspects of life and commerce. Besides being necessary, from the governments point of view, rule by a strong central leader or group is a cultural norm in most of these societies" The information Revolution in the Middle East and North Africa (2003:xii). RAND seems to have a selective and politically charged take on their findings.

[76] Apart from the difficulty to retrieve data from refugee camps in the host countries, an additional problem for the Occupied Territories is that the occupation made sampling and face-to-face methodologies very difficult.

It is clear now that although the ICT story in Palestine is still quite young it has already passed through three differently important stages. Prior to 1994 ICTs were almost nonexistent compared to other countries; from 1995 to 1999 the infrastructure grew rapidly, opening the door for new opportunities on which pioneering users capitalized; since 1999 infrastructure growth levelled off under the pressure of enormous political and military forces but access and use indicators grew rapidly as more users began to capitalize on the new opportunities. The political situation and the degree to which Israeli practices deter the diffusion are perhaps the most important determinants of ICT growth in Palestine. The growth summary in Table 2 gives a good view of the relative growths as it focuses on the data of all ICTs between 1999-2004, i.e. just before and in the middle of the second Intifada. The developments that took place in pre-Oslo stages are clearly reflected in the first growth trends (144% computer ownership and 70% home connection increase.[77]

The diffusion of telephone landlines exploded some time after 1995 and then stopped increasing in 1999 when it had reached 40 percent of households. However, although it remained constant since then, it seems that its increase, until 1999, opened an important door for other ICTs to grow until 2004, a door which was previously shut by Israeli forces. The internet continues to develop within the socio-political situation.[78] The role of (and relation between) state and technology is a recurring point in media and communication studies. The issue of state-controlled infrastructure within this context is important in tackling questions of ownership, technological set-up, or financial interest. In fact, any attempt to explore issues related to Palestine faces conceptual obstacles; the Palestinian case cannot be reduced to simple representations: "It lies at the centre of international conflicts, now claimed by some to be conflicts of "civilizations"; it is at the crossroads of superpower interests in the middle east; it involves some of the most important humanitarian crises" (Waked 2005:10).

In the discussion about the emergence of 'grassroots' internet groups and their potential for resistance and building communities, it is often assumed that the nation state no longer features as the privileged space for the representation of identity. It is crucial to be clear about such claims when the researched group lives under a military occupation that controls the territorial technological infrastructure.[79]

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[77] See Appendix 3 for the statistics, and for more analyses Elia Zureik's (2005c) large project on Palestinian ICT, which includes Waked's critical account I refer to here. It must also be noted that the definition/measure of internet penetration itself is subject of debate. It makes sense to measure internet connection in a home that actually offers internet connection to more than 5 direct family members, friends or neighbours.

[78] On top of the exponential poverty and unemployment described in the section before, more than 50% of the population lives in rural areas: with the occupation closure and curfews on top of this, Palestinian communities were even more isolated.

[79] During the heaviest military incursions in 20 years (in March 2002) the IDF destroyed roads, water pipelines, electricity, and power plants in most PNA cities and refugee camps.

2.4 Conclusion

It is clear that the progressive role of post Oslo returnees marked the birth of Palestinian ICT. Instead of generalizing about the weak ICT as yet another confirmation of Western superiority, it is clear that infrastructures should be measured in terms of the level of the national network.[80] The obvious assumptions upon which infrastructure indicators are based included state sovereignty, demarcation of the nation-state, and ownership/access to the infrastructure. In the case of Palestine, these assumptions are either invalid, or not in line with standard assumptions and assessments as analysed in the last section. Many ICT indicators are based on universal indicators that reflect neo-liberal ideologies; yet, failing to consider the basic effects of occupation and neo-liberal economic domination is like ignoring an elephant in the room. This does not do away with the positive potentials of the internet, but shows that assumptions in relation to ICT and internet potentials can be unclear or one-sided. Thus internet development should be considered through its potential for grassroots resistance to political powers within the context of dominant (top down) electronic media practices.

The concepts dealt with in this chapter constituted the theoretical frameworks of this research based on three general tensions: space, mobility, and resistance. Space and place were examined in terms of national identity coupled with virtual community. Mobility and immobility were linked to what transnationalism means for the Palestinian diaspora considering their 'state-less' and 'right-less' status. Despite a lack of full Palestinian sovereignty, it is important to note that the presence of the PNA had a positive impact on ICT development and internet utilization. Agency and tactical means of resistance are therefore at the core of Palestinian networks of support. I do not see resistance as a notion to be used without critical references to its actual impact, but rather, I take a dialectic approach that goes beyond utopian or dystopian conclusions. This is important to the theme of the next chapter in studying the contradiction between virtual mobility and everyday immobility, potentially resulting in the discovery of interesting new possibilities via internet use.

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[80] The RAND research even in 2003 when ICT showed a exponential growth in Palestine, could not predict any positive developments, nor did it specifically mention the Palestinian case: "It is unlikely that any country in the Middle East and North Africa, including Turkey but possible with the exception of Israel, will fully enjoy an information revolution during the next decade." The information Revolution in the Middle East and North Africa (2003:xiv)

Chapter 3: Palestinian Mobility Offline/Online

> Golda Meir once demanded: 'The Palestinians? Who are they? They don't exist!' But that was us streaming into Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, with tales of horror, persecution and fear, walking around in a daze, confronting one another with a set of baffling facts, but willing to wait for a few weeks, even months to return to our towns, homes, offices, and businesses.
>
> – Fewas Turki, 1974.

3.1 Introduction

The importance of online mediation and internet communication for Palestinians will be understood if related to the great discrepancy between their (national) aspirations and lived realities. One of the major problems facing Palestinians is the inability to move freely to–and-from geographic places, a direct consequence of a history of displacement. The Palestinian reality can be summarized as forced mobility that has left the majority of Palestinians homeless, colonized, or displaced without a right of return. The number of Palestinians that were forced to leave and became stateless is often a subject of debate, but the most general data are collected by UNRWA, and through further research and analysis by academics such as Elia Zureik (1994) and Lex Takkenberg (1998).

The Palestinians' sense of injustice is deepened by a prolonged rejection from the right of self-determination over the course of 60 years, and sharpened by the denial of the Palestinian 1948 exodus. The denial is enforced by the lack of acknowledgement of this part of history in favour of a focus on Israel's sudden new geographic existence, while overlooking the fact that the land in question was not empty but inhabited by people 'cleansed' of three-fourths of their population.[81] In the opening quote, Palestinian novelist Fewas Turki recounts the 1948 catastrophe (al-Nakba) with personal tales that bear historical evidence refuting Golda Meir's famous denial. Longing for a state and asserting their national identity have therefore become important symbols in the Palestinian's struggle for political justice, liberation, and everyday survival.

Nation-state, territory, and identity are thus inevitably related to free mobility. However, redefinitions of national identity contributed to a denial of the importance of state and territory, a hollow conclusion in the face of everyday (offline) contexts.[82] Everyday experiences of mobility explain the value of online mobility and

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[81] The position of Palestinian refugees is characterized as the most difficult in terms of civil rights and freedom of movement. For a historical framework, see Chapter One and comprehensive studies by Salam Abu Sita, Avi Shlaim or Ilan Pappe.

[82] Disregarding the importance of nation-state and territory and collective national identity as outdated is especially comfortable if we already have a piece of land to live on, constitutional rights that protect us, legal

access to alternative communication. In other words, the immobility of Palestinians and multi faceted consequences of Palestinian historical experience have greatly impacted the production and utilization of the internet. Retrospectively, it was an offline context in which I myself was confronted with the lack of movement and territorial autonomy and that made me value (free) mobility. During fieldwork in Palestine in 2002, Israeli soldiers drove by our houses in their tanks when curfew was imposed and shouted in broken Arabic: *Mamnu' at-tajawwul* [wander/walking outside prohibited], You are hereby prohibited to leave your house or walk around. If you do not follow these rules, measures will be taken. This curfew is imposed until further notice; anyone on the street will be shot at." This warning was sometimes mixed with insulting jokes and laughter, and eventually these pre-curfew patrols by Israeli soldiers had become a part of daily life. On another occasion, when I was at Ben Gurion Airport on my way to the West Bank for a second fieldwork period in 2003, the words "You are not welcome in Israel. You will be deported back to Amsterdam", was one of the defining moments in my understanding the reality of occupation and immobility.

Many of these experiences were also common to most Palestinians. But, while they share a collective history or everyday commonalities, there are also internal differences within the Palestinian community. Collective national identity does not do away with internal (class, legal, gender) differences. Moreover, Palestinians were forced to settle in different places and dealt with specific complications. As the political, economic, and social contexts of Occupied Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon differ, the experiences of Palestinians also differ according to local histories and traditions. For instance, internet usage among Palestinian expatriates in the US or Britain developed differently compared to stateless Palestinians in refugee camps in Lebanon. Thus the status of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and internet infrastructures in each of these settings, and the absent freedom of movement, determine whether and how internet access offers Palestinians new possibilities.

In Chapter Two I discussed the underlying conceptual notions that relate to mobility and nation-state. I have argued that in a Palestinian context transnational mobility mostly refers to *forced mobility*. And, I stated that diaspora experiences have little to do with voluntarism through open borders or with an evolution of network societies and free flows of spaces/places through ICT processes. I therefore found Smith and Guarnizo's (1998) understanding important; their analyses on processes of transnationalism are seen through local, national, and global perspectives and thus offer us a view from below. This view shows how "free mobility" is segregated; some have more and others have less mobility (Eagleton 2004). In this chapter I will continue to investigate the underlying notions of mobility with regards to the Palestinian diaspora, and the status of Palestinian refugees in particular. I wish to

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documents to move around with, or some of the basic means to resist injustice. See Callinicos, Eagleton, and Kellner for an excellent critique of the so-called evaporation of the nation-state.

uncover the contradictions I came across between immobility and mobility on and off-line–the first tension as presented in the preceding two chapters.

The start of this chapter will give a short historical explanation of the Palestinian diaspora, with specific attention to Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon where the largest Palestinian refugee communities live. Virtual mobility offers a social outlet, and an alternative way for refugees to meet with others, particularly other Palestinians. These cyber practices symbolize the birth of a new Palestinian virtual community. I will therefore discuss how alternative mobility through the internet overcomes separations and offline immobility, and how local initiatives capitalized on these opportunities. Furthermore, I will explain how this occurs through local and transnational communication. As technological possibilities grew they contributed to the survival of higher education in Palestine, and chatting became the most important grassroots form of internet communication. Finally, this chapter will conclude with an analysis of experiences of escapism and alienation, consequences of a technology embedded in a context of exile and isolation.

3.2 Diasporic Mobility: Forced Migration

Concepts of space and place offer interesting ways to contemplate the internet. The concept of place also helps to understand the construction of real and virtual places and differentiates between the local and global nature of internet interaction. Internet space challenges the classic definition of place as a bounded physical location of human activity, and encourages new theoretical constructs that account for unbounded spaces such as the internet (Zook 2006:56). In fact, the main dominant discourses about community also provide the frameworks for understanding *online* community. I understand (online) community as an ideal that constructs and maintains social bonds, but it is relevant to ask in which circumstances (why) Palestinians turn to online traversals. Virtual groups may fall short of being communities because the notion of community implies more than mere interaction. Moreover, online spaces or hybrid/network societies can,t be understood without reference to offline place—and the general ideal notion of community—because different kinds of community bonds can exist concurrently. Hence, new technological developments should be seen as a continuation of, rather than as a break from, older types of social interactions. Dawson asserts that online activities are only likely to generate a sense of community when the online interaction is anchored in a shared offline context; the significance of the internet lies not in where it competes with other sections of life but where it extends them (2003:8).

The diasporic version of mobility can be translated as mobility resulting from forced migration and exile. This is most clear in refugee camps in host countries. With 'Palestinian diaspora' I refer to a community living in exile, sharing the idea of a national home from which displacement occurred and was followed by more traumatic journeys. Additionally, ambiguous definitions of the term 'Palestinian

refugee' constrained the position of Palestinians in international law and propagated different human rights norms concerning Palestinian refugees (Takkenberg 1998:50). Besides being treated as pawns or serving as examples in political speeches, stateless Palestinians were sometimes randomly expelled from their host countries. Along with the expulsion of PLO cadres during political upheavals in Jordan and Lebanon, ordinary Palestinians were also (internally) expelled.[83] For Palestinians, 'diaspora space' evolves where boundaries of belonging/otherness and inside/outside are contested. [84]

Diasporans have a strong desire for a home while at the same time carrying different local and national identities. The geographic element reveals important differences between Jordan and Lebanon as Palestinian host states. Jordan is closely geographically connected to Palestine via the East and West Bank. Apart from location, time (duration) is also significant. In Jordan, many of the Palestinian refugees are present since the 1967 exodus, while in Lebanon the majority of refugees are settled since the 1948 exodus when they fled from their people and land. These territorial and temporal elements partly explain the closer ties between (Palestinians in) Jordan and Palestine compared to (Palestinians in) Lebanon and Palestine. The way Palestinians network with each other is partly defined by geographic location (Hanafi 2005). According to FAFO (2002), approximately 60% of Palestinians in Jordanian refugee camps still have strong links with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. In order to understand these refugee realities, I will start with a general overview of the Palestinian situation in Jordan and Lebanon.

Palestinian refugees: Exile

> For diasporic Palestinians, the charged term Return evokes nostalgia for the homeland they were forced to flee in 1948 and a reversal of the traumatic dispersion that sundered families, ruined livelihoods, and thrust Palestinians into humiliating refugee camps or individual adventures to rebuild lives armed with little more than birth certificates, keys to the homes left behind, and the stigma of having somehow lost their country to an alien people. The political insistence on the right of return is a demand for righting a moral wrong (Lila Abu Lughod, 2004:35).

The plight of the Palestinian refugees has become one of the most enduring. The main problem is Israel's refusal to acknowledge responsibility, but US/EU compliance made matters much more difficult (Talhami 2003). Abunimah (2001) points to the political double standards in a comparison with Balkan circumstances: "The same American officials and media pundits who thundered them about the inviolability of

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[83] See Takkenberg (1998:133-170) for a discussion on the status of Palestinian refugees in the Arab world, and the historical analyses here in Chapter Two.
[84] The 'inside' and 'outside' are common classifications in everyday Palestinian discourse and refer to Palestinians residing in the homeland (whether the occupied territories or Mandate Palestine/Israel), and the diaspora in exile.

refugee rights and the immorality of dispossession and forced exile, demanded that Palestinians drop their 'unrealistic demands' about refugee rights". The right of return (*ḥaqq al-'awda*) of refugees is bound with the demand for justice and desire to narrate their experiences. And as Abu-Lughod clearly confirms in the opening quote, the roots lie in 1948.

Between 1947 and 1948 there were many outbreaks of guerrilla warfare between armed militias and Palestinian/Arab resistance, but when the British left Palestine, full-scale ware broke out. This lasted almost a year and concluded in Jewish control of the majority of Palestinian territory (more than the share of land granted by UN resolution 181 in 1947). Apart from the colonization and further expropriation of land, the most important outcome was the birth of the refugee problem (Morris 1987). Palestinians fled to temporary camps in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria where they stayed in extreme conditions. The militias, and what became the new Israeli army, destroyed over 400 Palestinian villages. Meanwhile, the influx of World War 2 survivors, and later the 'Oriental Jews' from the Middle East and North Africa, increased; they took over the farms and homes that were left behind. The entry of one people marked the exodus of another.[85] Such narratives use to be controversial in academia, but since the 1980s (and particularly with contributions from 'new historians' in Israel), this critical view on what caused the Palestinian exodus is now broadly accepted.

After the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 in 1947 upper/middle class families from Haifa and Jaffa were already leaving the country and the Palestinian Arab resistance was destabilized with a bloody culmination in April/May 1948 when the militarily superior Jewish militias of Hagana and Irgun conquered most of the Palestinian villages and towns. Most Palestinians were left to fend for themselves (Morris 1987). Between August and the end of 1948 the majority of Palestinians left and became exiles when their attempts to return were prevented. People from the north of Palestine fled northwards to Syria and Lebanon, those from Jaffa and Beersheba fled southward into the Gaza Strip, and those from Jaffa, Ramleh and Jerusalem fled towards the West Bank and Jordan (Takkenberg 1998:14). Palestinians were simply banned from returning to their homes. Apart from administrative resolutions granting Palestinians the right to self-determination and return to their homeland, neither the UN nor any other international institution really pressured Israel to bare responsibility and abide to the conventions that offered Palestinian justice. This continued until the Palestinian refugee drama became a *de facto* reality it was too late to be reversed by the *faith-a-compli* politics, i.e. of establishing irreversible facts on the grounds. Thus, a majority of Palestinians had to flee for the

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[85] In *The concept of transfer in Zionist political thought 1882-1948,* Nur Masalha (1992) shows that long before 1948 Zionists developed strategies to transfer Arab Palestinians and that these same Transfer Committees also played a role in 1947/48. Palestinians were successfully dehumanized to the extent that in the West it didn't even matter what the historical context of the Palestinian diaspora was; Arabs have the whole Middle East to live in.

foundation of a new nation-state that was based on the superiority of one ethnicity/religion (instead of citizenship) over another.

The UN were then required to step in and guarantee basic care for refugee Palestinians; the United Nation Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) was created by UN General Assembly Resolution 302 of 8 December 1949. Its founding target was to prevent starvation and conditions of distress (mainly in order to maintain political stability in the region). For most camps (in Palestine and outside), the presence of the UNRWA symbolized the difference between survival and collapse. The UNRWA is now poorly resourced and barely able to help overcome the current realities in Palestinian refugee camps. According to many of the organizers in the Palestinian refugee camps in Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon, UNRWA decreased its required services contrary to the growing needs in the camps. Furthermore, the United Nations (the financial backbone of UNRWA) has increasingly lost its independence.[86] Economic stability and political independence (of Palestinians and UNRWA) in the camps is hardly possible; it is therefore certainly more difficult to be a refugee in a host country than in Palestine. In Palestine, the towns surrounding the camps were at least accessible for refugees, so aside from internal class differences and prejudices between camps, there was less segregation between Palestinians from camps and cities/towns I encountered in Palestine, than in Lebanon and Jordan.

Though this research focuses on Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon, life certainly differs according to the country of residence. The wars of 1948, 1967, and the Gulf Wars made Jordan host to one of the largest refugee communities in the Middle East. The first stream of Palestinian refugees, with higher levels of educational and labor skills, benefited Jordan. The refugees were able to gain access to social capital with high-wage occupations and particularly developing the commercial industry. Many of the better-off urban classes managed to continue to live their middle/upper class lifestyles in Jordan and, to a lesser extent, Lebanon. Later when the 1967 refugees arrived from the West Bank and Gaza, political and social stratification had advanced. Of the 13 official refugee camps in Jordan, only four (Irbid, Wihdat, Zarqa and Hussain camp) date back to 1948. Despite the fact that most Palestinians have a similar legal status to Jordanians, and certainly better legal status than in other host countries, Palestinian refugees in camps are worse of than non-camp Palestinians. Moreover, there is less interactivity between Jordanian camps and nearby Jordanian cities (in terms of employment, education, or social visits). This effects the movements to and from the camps and also impacts visits to internet cafes outside the camp.

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[86] The US is the major power in the UN and especially under the Bush government it treats the Palestinian case in its own interests and when it pleases. See for example the report by UN Middle East commissioner Alvaro de Soto.

Jordan: Between assimilation and segregation

Despite the similarities in language and culture between refugees and non-refugees in the host countries, and better legal status of Palestinians in Jordan compared to elsewhere in the Arab diaspora, there is a clear concentration of poverty and deprivation amongst camp refugees both in Jordan and Lebanon. Different community leaders and researchers in the camps in Jordan told me that the challenge and responsibility for Palestinian refugees increased enormously. And comparative research on the living conditions of Palestinian camp populations in Jordan (Marwan Khawaja and Age A. Tiltnes (Eds) FAFO 2002) shows that a Palestinian refugee lacks much basic care. Palestinians are not one fixed entity in the host countries, but reflect different class and exile trajectories.

The status of Palestinians in Jordan is rather confusing because the majority of the population in this host country is Palestinian by origin. The different context is particularly shaped by the country's history as a (new) neighbouring nation-state of Palestine/Israel. The West Bank (and its inhabitants) was part of Jordan's East Bank after the founding of Israel, until Israel occupied the remaining territories in 1967. This means that Jordan hosts different categories of Palestinian refugees: those from 1948; those displaced in 1967, those from 1948 that were *again* displaced in 1967, and Palestinians displaced from Gaza in 1967. After the second massive influx of refugees into Jordan during the 1967 war the increasing number of Palestinians strengthened the political position of Palestinian organizations and led to tensions with the Jordanian ruling class.[87]

Since the establishment of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan after WW II, Palestinians from the West Bank and East Bank were considered Jordanian citizens. The unification of both banks doubled the Jordanian population at once (Takkenberg 1998:158). Palestinians enjoyed the same rights and obligations as other Jordanian nationals, including positions in the military service. Palestinians soon gained the highest positions in society such as Prime Minister and owner of the Arab Bank. However, Palestinians were later accorded a different status. Refugees from 1967 and refugees from Gaza were inferior to earlier Palestinian Jordanians. These were also the groups that resided mostly in camps under difficult conditions.[88] The director of Refugees, Displaced persons and Forced Migration Centre (RDFSC) agreed that life in the camps is very difficult: "Children are sometimes forced to study in the street because they don't have electricity at home, or they go to the mosque because it is

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[87] This exploded into direct confrontations in September 1970 (also commonly referred to as *Ailul al-Aswad*, Black September, Black September). After this experience the centre of Palestinian politics shifted to Lebanon.

[88] The citizenship status of West Bank and East Bank Palestinians was defined until the First Intifada (1987). In 1988 King Hussain renounced his claim over the WB acknowledging Palestinian (PLO) sovereignty, with the effect that WB Palestinians lost citizenship In practice most Palestinians could keep their Jordanian passports until replaced by a passport from the Palestinian state. However, since 1988 these Jordanian passports were only temporarily valid, WB Palestinians with Jordanian passports could only reside in Jordan for a maximum of 30 days. More on Palestinian-Jordanian history in Takkenberg, 1998:158-16.

overcrowded and noisy at home". There is also little to no political activity in the Jordanian camps, contrary to the situation in Lebanon as I will explain in the next section.

A special permission from the Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA) is required for journalists and researchers who want to enter the camp to talk to the people themselves.[89] The Governor of the area where the camp is located, the Camp Committee, and the UNRWA are the three channels through which Palestinians must manoeuvre. One of the camps I got to know was al-Bekkaa, Jordan's biggest camp with nearly 200.000 refugees. According to several Palestinian NGOs, the DPA is sometimes involved in the work and decisions of the al-Bekaa Camp Committee; and the governing body is present during the Committee's main meetings. When local activist Rabia from the camp was elected as a representative in the Camp Committee, the DPA intervened and blocked the procedures. According to some people I spoke with this was because she is outspoken and enjoys a lot of support in the camp.

After four to six decades of exile in camps in Jordan, many Palestinians (particularly from the camps) still live under difficult circumstances. Their households are even larger than in Lebanese camps; the average household size in West Amman refugee camp is even higher than in Gaza, but this is also related to the lower mortality rate in Jordan. The ability to finally move out of the camps is much smaller than people's desire to do so, and those who actually do manage to safely leave, built their houses near the camp in order to be near their social networks and family (FAFO 2002).

With Palestinians making up the majority of the population in Jordan (and Palestine located practically on the other side of the mountain), the political developments are still a threat to Jordan. RDFSC director: "The political experience in Jordan is still recent. Since the conflict of the 1970s, many people turned away from political involvement." Especially after Black September 1971, many Palestinian activists left Jordan, some becoming NGO organizers. An interview with one of the successful Palestinians illustrates how different life is for an upper-class Palestinian compared to a refugee in a camp:

> I never lived in a camp. In 1973 I visited Palestine with my parents for the first time, I went back in 1996 after Jordan's peace treaty with Israel. I have two Jordanian passports now, one with an Israeli visa that always enables me to go to Palestine. That is not strange, there are even rich Saudi Palestinians that are granted entry to Israel… though I very much identify as a Jerusalemite Palestinian, in a casual conversation I say I'm from Jordan. The new term is 'a Jordanian of Palestinian origin'.

With so many Palestinian Jordanians it seems odd that refugees remain in camps, but in reality just a small minority in the camps has a chance to move out. And enough do try, because for many it is hard to live in the isolated camps, as Riba in al-

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[89] Permission is difficult to receive, and during one experience I was asked to stop in the middle of an interview with the camp representative.

Bekaa camp said: "We know that we have the *mukhabarat* (secret service) everywhere, it is part of our daily lives." The experiences very much portray the complexity of the Palestinian refugee issue in Jordan. On top of the general frustration amongst camp dwellers, the situation has worsened since the Intifada.

Interviews with refugees in the camps and with Palestinian students in Amman confirmed the repression during protests against Jordanian/Israeli politics. Outbursts of anger and grief about what happened in Palestine often turn into demonstrations. I was told that people were shot at with paint bullets by riot squads (to easily identify the protesters in the crowd), arrested, and abused; at demonstrations in a refugee camp teargas bombs were thrown inside the homes. Medical NGOs reported that a number of women later suffered miscarriages. One of the volunteers at a Women's Centre in the camp related dismay at what happened: "Riots broke out after the Intifada, two refugees, of which one child, were killed when people tried to get out and demonstrate in support of Palestine." She explained that the painful difference for Palestinians I interviewed in Jordan was that in Palestine the Israeli occupation forces were responsible, while in Jordan they suffered at the hands of Arab authorities. Some of the stories were indeed similar to the scenes I saw in Palestine during fieldwork in 2001/2002.

A clear difference between Jordan and Lebanon is that Palestinians in Jordan are still connected through relatives and kinship with those in Palestine. One therefore finds condolences in local Jordanian newspapers and *biyut al-'aza'* (condolence/mourning ceremonies) in the camp, for relatives killed in Palestine. Intifada victims with acute injuries that are given permission to get medical treatment in Jordan can make use of family or village networks. Interaction between Palestinians and Jordanians is relatively normalized, and many Palestinians in the West Bank are permitted to visit their relatives in Jordan. This type of relation with Palestine is impossible for refugees in Lebanon. One person I interviewed in Jordan wondered what was worse, the deteriorating situation of Lebanon or that of Jordan. Murad formulated it as coming down to the choice: "Do I want political integrity and freedom of speech, but be treated as a dog like in the camps of Lebanon?"

Lebanon: "Two Mothers"

As early as 1972 Israel started attacking Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, invading and occupying South Lebanon in 1978. As the Lebanese civil war broke out in 1976, and Israel invaded Lebanon again in 1982, the consequences were even more dramatic (Takkenberg 1998:18). Lebanon never really had a serious policy to integrate Palestinian refugees in Lebanese society. In fact, the state actively tried to segregate Palestinians. As Lebanon was constructed by colonial powers in a precariously sectarian way (power access according to competing ruling communities based on

religious affiliation), the influx of thousands of Palestinian Sunni Muslims and far less Palestinian Christians immediately became an issue of political interests.[90]

From their arrival as refugees in 1948, Palestinians had been subject to repressive practices by the *Deuxieme Bureau* (the security service known *al-maktab al-thani)* in the late 1960s (known as *ayyam al-thawra, revolutionary days*) when the PLO played a major role in liberating the camps from this repression. The stories I collected amongst refugees in the camps of Lebanon expressed the Palestinian isolation and suffering very well. With the Tel al-Zaatar massacre in 1976, Sharon's 1982 massacres in Sabra and Shatila, and the 'war of the camps' between 1984-87, Lebanon is the site of a painful Palestinian history: 12 refugee camps with nearly half million refugees still bear witness.

The year 1982 is one of the defining moments in contemporary Palestinian narratives in poetry and songs. After a two-month Israeli siege of Beirut, the PLO agreed to withdraw Lebanon. Residents of the camps were vulnerable to attack and it was in this context that the massacres at the camps took place. The atrocities by then Minister of Defense (and later Prime Minister) Ariel Sharon with on-the-ground assistance by Lebanese (*Phalange*) fascist militias in Sabra and Shatila, shocked the world. Sabra and Shatila, and other massacres, became part of the collective memory of most people I met and interviewed. For example, 36-year-old Ahmed who lives in Shatila:

> The second time after they entered our house and started shooting I hid with my 7-year old brother Ismael in the bathroom, we came out when the Phalanges left after they shot my family. Suad received about 16 shots and was paralysed. My brother and I couldn't carry her, so we left the house and saw many bodies lying in the alleys, dead people. But we weren't the only ones who had been attacked and shot in the house. Killing was everywhere; the killers were still in the camp. Everybody in the camp had expected the Israelis would come and do as they did in Saida: arrest the wanted people, put them in the Ansar concentration camp and leave most of the people. This is why we stayed at home in Shatila. We only found out that a massacre was taking place in the evening… Shadi, Shadia, Fareed, Bassam and Hajar – five children – plus my father were killed.

Ahmad's family was split in half, his five siblings plus their father were killed, and five of the children plus their mother survived.

The treatment of Palestinians in Lebanon is fused by discrimination as they enjoy very few rights. Growing fears of demographic changes because a large majority of the Palestinians was Muslim (Sunni/Muslims becoming a majority in the sectarian based Lebanese constitution) had initially led Christian leaders and feudal lords to stir up public opinion against refugees (Mirhi Nasser 2002). The already severe conditions

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[90] Status of Palestinians was also an issue of class: the upper class and wealthy Palestinians that left Palestine before the great exodus and settled in Lebanon were given Lebanese nationality. Probably even more immoral and unethical was the special exception in the 1950s; Palestinian Christians could receive Lebanese citizenship in order to outnumber the Lebanese Muslims.

arising from the lack of basic services were aggravated by the policies of the Lebanese government who, worried of the so-called *Tawtin* (permanent settlement), imposed more restrictions. Housing development was prohibited, limitations were enforced on the employment of Palestinians, and martial law was imposed on the camps (idem). In Lebanon, Palestinian students in UN refugee schools are not free to choose their higher education curriculum; attendance to medical and law school are not allowed, no matter how talented the refugee is. Palestinians are banned from many professions, due to this law and the high rate of unemployment; many university graduates end up selling vegetables on the market or work as taxi drivers.

The Palestinian status is worse than that of any other foreigner in Lebanon and they are denied basic government services. Examples of institutional discrimination are denial of access to legal employment or travel documents. Many Palestinians are not even entitled to services by UNRWA, the only safety net left for the refugees, due to bureaucratic classifications of the refugee law. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon consist of the poorest sector in society, and the poorest grouping of Palestinian refugees in the Arab World. Due to the high population density and the civil war, Lebanon hosts an additional 42.000 unregistered refugees in approximately 20 (non-UNRWA recognized) 'population collectives'. The internal sectarian sensitivity and the human suffering of Palestinians were more affected by the military conflicts and Israeli sieges against the camps. Palestinian refugees suffered after the PLO leadership (till then functioning as a shadow state and main shield for Palestinians) withdrew from Lebanon. Most services that were provided by the various PLO institutions were eventually aborted. The internal conflicts that occurred between the remaining Palestinian factions, and between various Lebanese groups, further aggravated the situation. In the aftermath of the 1982 Israeli massacres, the camps were again under attack.

Syria had a vested interest in gaining influence over the PLO. These interests, Israel's aim to crush the PLO resistance, and the growing political relations of Shiite factions in the South fused. The Syrian-supported Lebanese Amal militia attacked Palestinian refugees during the 1985 battle of the camps. The bombing of refugee camps in Beirut lasted for four weeks. This internal war led to enormous destructions of the refugee camps infrastructures, and thousands of Palestinian losses (Hagopian 1985). [91] Combined with the aforementioned problems of UNRWA, and the complete lack of political relevance to Western interests, Lebanese camps represent among the worst living conditions.

The camp houses are very cold and damp in winter, and when the rain causes floods because sewage pipes get clogged, it is even more difficult to manage. In some camps, water pipes are above the ground and not protected, thus vulnerable to damage by carriages, pedestrians, or waste and as a result the water supply is

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[91] While camps were under siege, Palestinians joined with the Lebanese resistance front against Israeli occupation and Israel's client South Lebanese Army. See more in Elaine C. Hagopian (ed 1985).

sometimes contaminated. During an interview with political representative Abu Basel in Bourj Shamali he described the conditions:

> In 1974 four schools were build in this camp, now in 2004 we have the same four schools and they were never developed or improved. Meanwhile the population increased from 11.000 to 17.000, 40 to 45 children are jammed into one classroom. In this winter 19 houses are in urgent need for reconstruction. A few days ago pieces of a ceiling fell down on a person that was sleeping.

Working and participating in the camps meant that one had to face the reality of these facts. During the course of research, several interviews were cancelled because it was difficult to move around the camp due to overflowed alleys and power cuts. There is not always a sense of misery as one would expect. Samar and Maher from Shatila express the love/hate relationship people have towards Lebanon:

> Lebanon and Palestine are like two mothers, one gave us the soul and the other raised us. Our main mother is Palestine for we are not from Lebanon's blood. Life in a camp is full of contradictions, its beautiful and at same time miserable. If you want to see people suffer, come to the camp where we face so many problems. But when I have been away for a few days I feel the need to go back to our camp where it's warm and I feel safe. Samar

> We didn't sell our land or abandon our homeland, we didn't pretend to be different, or twist our tongues to look and sound Lebanese, and we are still living as Palestinians. Maher

As depicted in Samar's narrative, a history of collective Palestinian and Lebanese resistance against Israel is an important factor in the refugee's sentiments towards Lebanon. The heroic stories, songs, plays, and poems about the revolutionary years in Lebanon still inspire Palestinians in the diaspora and Occupied Territories. The folk references also still fuel a recurring aspiration: a return to Palestine. But the right of return, although affirmed in international UN Resolution 194, was not even mentioned in the 1993 Oslo Agreement because as Chomsky (2001) argued, Oslo was a total victory, on every point.

Based on the findings discussed in the previous section, it was not surprising to find that the internet's primary value is defined in terms of an alternative Palestinian public sphere. Increasing divisions of Palestinian communities along regional lines (resulting from displacement) also became present internally (inside Palestine) resulting from the wall cutting the West Bank and checkpoints paralysing mobility between the West Bank and Gaza. Internet facilitates in reconnecting Palestinian society (and refugees in particular) by offering a virtual space that is accessible. Interactive (between countries) and intra-active (in the camp/country) internet communication led to ground-breaking changes; with this tool the diaspora is given the possibility to talk and see each other (with voice chat and web cam). The interviews I conducted, the drawings and posters or discussions and songs that I saw and encountered, expressed an agonizing spirit and proved to me that the hope of

return remains an important premise. One of the ways to realize part of the diasporas' dream is the strengthening of personal ties with historic Palestine. Because for the refugees 'outside', people who live inside (historic Palestine and OT) personify the 'lost' and 'future' Palestinian state. The examples provided within the context of the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, illustrate the importance of internet usage as a social outlet, especially virtual mobility.

3.3 Virtual (alternative) Mobility

> If I didn't have the internet during the Ramallah sieges, I would have been insane by now. Rama, Ramallah, 2002.

The internet can transcend different forms of spaces by, for example, linking people from offline diasporic territories. The internet gives people a sense of empowerment and at the same time motivates them to reach out beyond their own territorial places. Online spaces are *vehicles* that assert and visualize the dream of a territorial Palestinian space. However, the existing objective conditions, such as the required capital to obtain a PC, infrastructure for cable connection, or mediocre connectivity, can still limit internet users.[92] But, the internet 'glue' got stickier when possibilities for interactive/participatory usage became easier. Access to (and consumption of), the internet requires a basic computer and telephone connection. Similarly, managing production of internet content only requires training that can be obtained in community-camp centres, schools, from friends, or even learned autodidactic. As a result, different alternative online communities are being set-up, often framed according to national and political aspirations.

The section before clarified that the assumed disappearance of (the value) state and national community is not the main problem but that direct disappearance of villages, olive trees, houses, and a violent abortion of part of Palestinian history are. The strong nostalgia towards a Palestinian national community online and offline is a reminder of what is lost. As long as injustice from loss of land, autonomy, and exile exist, the wish for Palestinian independence/national identity (Chapter Four) and activism (Chapter Seven) most probably also will. Understanding the relative meaning of the concept of virtual mobility was a personal experience when I lived in the occupied territories. Being bored or lonely during curfew, or upset and angry because the entrance to a town was closed by checkpoints had a profound impact on me. Fieldwork realities made me also value the relevance of the internet. Thus rather than replace or substitute the offline or everyday, I my online interactions to contribute to and strengthen them.[93] Online community is therefore embedded in real life.[94]

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[92] It is important to acknowledge the problems of digital divide and 'virtual imperialism', a term coined by Rheingold (1993).
[93] Immobility and isolation as viewed from my own experience is certainly unparalleled with those of Palestinians without alternatives. Ultimately, as a foreign researcher it was a matter of choice whether to stay. Most Palestinians were not free to choose.

After having viewed forced mobility, I now take a closer look at how virtual mobility can be an outlet, allowing an escape into virtual reality through online encounters with comrades, other peer groups, or newly found family members. Zen, who lived her whole life in the West Bank and was a student at Birzeit University, told me about her experience finding a family member on the internet:

> I got in touch with an aunt in Australia through the internet. I email her and we have more contact now. She motivates me to visit her. It was difficult for me to decide whether to call her, how to introduce my self, what to say. I was afraid that if you meet a person you have never seen in real life before, it will be so different. I also met family in Austria and Canada through the internet. I started to know people I never even knew existed. Zen, Ramallah 2002

The new encounters between refugees through the internet also meant a transformation of the idealized imagined community. The many NGO projects and grassroots initiatives I got acquainted with (run by people from the camp or volunteers) formed the backbone of institutionalized online communities.

Several on-the-ground initiatives brought internet advantages to a higher level. Some projects were set up within existing community programs, which was an important strategy because they could build on community support that they already had. The new initiatives in the camps symbolized the upheaval of Palestinian professional internet practices. The role of the internet proved crucial to helping save the academic education in Palestine during the Intifada. All these enterprises might be viewed as a revolutionary leap in the evolution of Palestinian communication. Palestinians soon engaged in many of the internet-mediated public spheres. What evolved from spontaneous and incidental initiatives, continued to grow and professionalize. In this section I wish to go deeper into how the local context and online traversals of the diaspora developed through the introduction of mailing lists, local internet initiatives, and grassroots chat participation.

Evolution of a grassroots tool

The development of direct online interaction via the internet already started in the 1990s with Palestinian intellectuals. Hanafi (2001) discussed one of the first Palestinian projects of internet-based networks—Palestinian Scientists and Technologists Abroad (Palesta). The Palesta network functioned as a discussion group as well as a database of professional Palestinians in the (West) diaspora and aimed to find a solution to the sense of isolation many felt as a result of inaccessibility to Palestinian territory. Recognizing the impossibility of returning to Palestine and the reality of immobility, Palesta's mailing list constituted an important cost-effective means of communication. The project was set-up in order to "harness the scientific

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[94] Here 'embeddednes' is not a question of choice, political-economy are also determining factors, like the lack of access to infrastructure and cables, prohibition of sending letters to and from Palestine, impossibility of visiting a relative across the border, difficulty of obtaining permission for opening an IC in a camp, etc.

and technological knowledge of expatriate professionals for the benefit of development efforts in Palestine" (Hanafi 2001:4). The online discussions covered a variety of issues, like the eventual return to the homeland, or the mismanagement of the PLO leadership. Palesta was the first to create a relation between the off- and on-line worlds and formed a unique online public sphere. However, as it may be typical of any public sphere, this online network did not include of social strata.

Hanafi's study was an important introduction to the new communication styles. The virtual interactions via Palesta were a new way of returning to Palestine. This networking through the internet does not suggest the end of geography but a reshaping of geography by connecting the different dispersed communities. Palesta privileged middle class Palestinians because the academic community in countries such as Britain or the US was the main group involved in these internet-mediated communications, and thus, the dominant language of communication was English (Hanafi 2001:15). Palesta was the predecessor of a technique that became one of the most important communication tools: emailing comments or contributions to a list of subscribers. When the internet made its mass appearance, auspiciously coinciding with the Intifada, an explosion of similar initiatives appeared online. What began as an elite communication style became an infrastructure used by non-elite mass audiences and grassroots organizations.

The Netscape Usenet groups like soc.culture.palestine and soc.culture.arab were the first, and Yahoo E-Groups such as IAPinfo or FreePalestine! soon followed in the virtual scene. At the time of my fieldwork, statistics of these groups showed that March and April 2002 were the peak months: these were the months that the Jenin massacres and attack on Arafat's compound took place. The FreePalestine! mailing list started in November 2001 and called itself "A secular voice in the electronic wilderness" and aimed at connecting Palestinians and sympathizers. The mailing lists were successful in linking the online and offline networks. Internet helped evolve new social bonds between individuals and organizations by transcending borders and government regulations People were able to get in touch in ways not possible before. This type of internet communication changed the dynamics of relationships, whether person to person or person to institutions.

The new internet media proved to be a very important tool in connecting communities to one another. Post-Oslo returnees and expatriates played a crucial role in the development of Palestinian based information sources as they started their own mailings and websites to share their experiences. Sam Bahour explained how the need for closer internal contact and alternative information came together:

> When a lot of us IT-oriented Palestinians returned from different countries in the world, we were like orphans. In a country that was not particularly on the brink of an IT revolution either, so we created the ITSIG mailing list as a group of friends. We started with ten guys from abroad related to IT. It now has 600 members of IT-focused people in Palestine. It moved from friendly discussions and 'lets go out for coffee tonight', to discussing and criticizing policy issues, bringing up new ideas,

and providing a soundboard for IT issues.[95]

Sam Bahour had returned to Palestine from the US just two years before the Intifada in 2000. He also began sending personal stories from his own email address to friends and family. But the emails then grew out into a mailing list of more than 1000 subscribers, who would in return forward the stories to others. This was the experience of different initiatives.

Karma Abu Sharif, who lived in Palestine when I interviewed her, is a 28-year-old Palestinian/Lebanese woman who had also returned with her father after Oslo. She was trained as a journalist in Britain and had some journalistic experience in Beirut. We met for several long talks in 2001 and 2002 when she explained how her internet involvement started:

> I followed the mainstream media and heard nothing about what was happening on the ground, something that really gave me a panic. 10 people were killed daily with live ammunition to the head. We would hear "10 Palestinians are killed in clashes". But what are these 'clashes'? In fact, they are children demonstrating—throwing stones that couldn't even reach a tank, that are being shot in the head. I call that 'targeted killings'. So I would send emails to anyone who I thought could make a difference. About what was actually going on, with the names of the killed children, how they were killed…I started mailing 5 or 6 friends, and began doing it almost every day.

Karma and Sam illustrate two different examples of the birth of a new strategic tool used to confront the biased news. In fact, nearly all Palestinian mailing lists started with the Intifada and out of a great sense of frustration about the media. The emails were widely forwarded and eventually the messages created a snowball effect. In due course, the initiatives became more structured, frequent, and professional. Karma recalls her new internet enterprise, a contribution that helped establish a grassroots archive of events in Palestine during the Intifada years:

> …I discovered that there is local and alternative news but that it is not being exported. I spoke the language [English] well, could relate to the [American/European] people, and knew how to get through to them. I sometimes have to downplay my stories because the truth is so astonishing that people just won't believe you. Although I also got hate mail many people encouraged me to continue. The point is; it went up from my own 5 friends, to a few thousand subscribers. People started addressing me as 'staff', not knowing just one person was behind it. Now that I look back at the archive, I see that I have a full record of the Intifada because I did it on a daily basis, non-stop, for three years.

Understanding the world of Western journalism very well as a freelance journalist, Karma Abu Sharif diverted her frustration and anger with *Hear Palestine* (see Picture 15) into what she could do best. News from *Hear Palestine's* mailing list made a

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[95] Interview Ramallah, 13/11/02

difference for independent journalists and activists who couldn't find such local sources for themselves. Israel distributed piles of well-written, Western style ready-made- information for journalists. Organizers complained to me that journalists were very lazy; the cut and paste technique seemed the most used method, and most were not even based in the Occupied Territories.

Karma's *Hear Palestine* briefings and journalism were a creative and unique response to fill this gap. Middle East journalists of British and American papers, but also several Israeli journalists were on her mailing list. The briefings developed and improved throughout the different phases of the Intifada. From the hurriedly written and angry personal accounts, they became newsletters widely circulating online. The newsletters started with a small introduction, then a section detailing what had happened in the different cities; it often continued with a her own feature story , and ended with news on international solidarity events. According to Karma, people needed and wanted this kind of information badly: "I can't believe people are interested in Britney Spear's virginity while these atrocities are taking place" was one of the solidarity responses she received to her briefings.

Mailing lists and website organizers told me that frequency, tone, language, and content were the crucial elements determining successful Palestinian Public Relations. Similar to *Free Palestine!*'s attempt to focus mainly on political work, the *Palestine Monitor* (Picture 12) mailing list targeted specific audiences with specific approaches. They had the Dutch, British, French, German, and American members of parliament and congress as well as various solidarity groups on their list. The British parliament members did not receive the mailings everyday for tactical reasons:

> Internet is an unbelievable tool for us. Only a few can come to Palestine but we still want people to see the situation. When we first started we had about 50 people on the mailing list. In two years we build it up to 13.000 people. It is important they get something innocuous, not 'the horrible Israeli army attacked innocent Palestinians' messages, but some 20 readable lines of what basically happened. We also have other subscribers who want regular things, like media people that work in Israel and Palestine. Eventually, it's not a matter of numbers, but what could actually be done.

The international reports on *Hear Palestine* and *Palestine Monitor* also offered news of demonstrations in Italy and Britain in order to bridge the international solidarity groups with Palestinians.

In July 2001, *Hear Palestine* subscribers received a simple email saying, "We apologize for recent delays, *Hear Palestine* has been sabotaged'. It was obvious that everybody did not appreciate Karma's work: she was hacked by pro-Israeli hacktivists. Nevertheless, in a technological/cyber way, Karma continued to play her part in political activism equipped with a computer, radio, newspapers and mobile phone as her weapons. At the time of our meetings, *Hear Palestine* had become a full time job, almost an obsession:

> I start my day very early, read the local newspapers and then listen to Palestinian radio *Sawt Falastin* [the voice of Palestine], which gives daily detailed local news. I then switch off my mobile, take a pen and paper, concentrate, and just write and write, putting it all down in my own style. Every hour I try to listen to Israeli Arab radio stations, BBC Arabic, or check the official Palestinian press agency Wafa to complete my stories. I know the staff at Wafa by now so I phone them and sometimes get the news before it's published.[96]

The acceleration of violence and the dramatic events in 2002 were also part of the work on mailing lists, like Karma said:

> What I see and hear is insane, we Palestinians seem to stop realizing ourselves how drastic it actually is. *Hear Palestine* became an obsession. I even stopped seeing people. I would feel guilty just sitting and talking to friends. I almost fell into a depression and had to take a break from everything.

Anger about the media bias was turned into something useful by the work of Karma. As outlined before, in this sense the second Intifada showed to be different compared to the first Intifada in 1987-1991. More than ever, information from Palestinian sources manages to go out and travel over time and space. But this doesn't offer the end of occupation; Patricia at *Palestine Monitor* offered an important insight: "We don't know how much better it could have been, but we also don't know how worse the situation would be if we didn't have this availability to news and information thanks to the internet."

The *Palestine Monitor* mailing list continued working during the sieges of Palestinian cities and even the siege of its office in March 2002. When the Webmaster had to escape to Jerusalem, they managed to bring out the urgent appeals and local news that were clearly barred from mainstream media. The appeal to take action in a report titled 'Attacks on Medical Services' is a good example. It described in detail the people (doctors, ambulance drivers, nurses) that were killed. It showed that the Israeli attacks deliberately prevented health care from reaching the injured civilians. The *Palestine Monitor* reminded its receivers how this was a severe violation of international law and the 4th Geneva Convention in which it is agreed to protect medical services. These laws were ignored when Israeli soldiers attacked marked cars, and after the Red Cross had coordinated their arrival prior to the local army staff. Some of these inside stories were taken over by other media sources.

Alternative mobility progressed beyond the level of mailing lists. It also meant the creation of a virtual gate for intellectual survival - one of the most important priorities for Palestinian society.

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[96] Interview Ramallah Palestine, 2001

The Great Portal

> Education is a major priority in Palestinian life. Universities managed to hold classes and students graduated throughout many years of crisis. To add additional complexities, the policy of destruction and curfews are accompanied by closures, putting Israeli military roadblocks and checkpoints between students and their school or university. In short, it is now common knowledge that Sharon is sentencing young generations to illiteracy, or at best, ignorance. Sam Bahour, Ramallah, 2002.

Sometimes something extremely negative like a military occupation, can lead to something exceptionally progressive as Karma showed above. A new programme for E-learning was also born out of a great necessity. This "combined and uneven development" symbolized that everyday conditions are not determined only by linear historical developments. Apart from a strong sense of necessity due to the practical fact of occupation related to the Second Intifada, the empowering connection between IT and education also ties with Palestinian history.

Social mobility in Palestinian society is mainly achieved through education. All other significant arenas, political or economic were inaccessible by occupation; but intellectual space was relatively independent in the occupied territories. Computers and IT are linked to education and have a flavour of development. These considerations therefore offered internet use an important legitimacy. I would often hear examples of a Palestinian father that certainly wishes to buy a computer for his daughter because he hopes it will be an investment for her education and thus her future.

One of the most exciting examples I encountered of the revolutionary effects of the internet relates directly to the Intifada and occupation. 'Ritaj' at Birzeit University in Palestine, is an internet Portal for students and faculty originally initiated to improve administrative efficiency. The aims were more efficient procedures for admission, registration, course selection, and to improve communication between faculty and students. But the project was stalled by the constant disruptions of occupation and checkpoints between Ramallah and Birzeit. In March 2002, when the Israeli Occupation Forces entered Ramallah and imposed a curfew, physical access to the University was very limited. Unless something was done to address the situation immediately, it would cause catastrophic implications for the students and the University. At that moment the Computer Centre at Birzeit realized that the internet based portal that they envisioned before the Intifada, could be adapted as an effective tool in combating the extreme situation. The initial system was restructured and became an on-line educational support tool for students and staff. The IT team worked day and night for two months to develop and implement the system. It was impressive how they designed and tested the first ever On-Line Learning System of Palestine. The house of one of the IT coordinators was turned into the primary workstation to enable the programmers to work round the clock and avoid further delay by curfew. They decided to name it "Ritaj", meaning 'the great portal' in Arabic.

Almost 30% of the students at the time of the launch were computer illiterate and as such would not be able to use the system. In response, the IT department decided to set up computer literacy courses that could at least provide students with the basics. The high acceptance rate by the university community surprised the staff at the Computer Centre. The faculties soon realized that, in effect, Ritaj would not only solve the curfew and closure crises at the time, but could entail a revolution in the general learning process of Palestine. Despite occupation, closures, curfews, and other disruptions, Birzeit University managed to complete two out of three semesters of the 2001/2002 academic year in August 2002. It also enabled over 3,300 students to register for the first semester of the 2002/2003 academic year on-line, saving them the trouble and humiliation of crossing or bypassing the checkpoints and making the dangerous trip to Birzeit University for this purpose. Though Ritaj was still a new service, the results for using it as a tool to confront the challenges created by the occupation and curfews were astonishing. It provided Birzeit University with the capability to participate in the information technology era - despite *and* because of Palestine's many political and economic disadvantages. Professional initiatives like Ritaj and *Palestine Monitor* were not the only ones to go online; everyday Palestinian internet engagement was also very inspiring.

Refugee Encounters: Local initiatives

One of the most important effects of 'virtual' technology is its transnational virtue and ability to locate and localize. 21-year-old Nuhad from Shatila camp is one of the people I spoke with showing great interest in local Palestinian culture and history. Through the internet she found a new way to gain further knowledge about, among other topics, traditional Palestinian costume:

> We knew songs and stories about Palestine before, but only the basics.
> Now, every time I am at the internet café I surf websites about Palestine.
> It helps to understand more about Palestinian culture, music, etc., things
> that I didn't know before. I didn't know which traditional costumes and
> dresses belonged to which city for example. Was it from Ramallah or
> Nablus? We didn't even know where that city was located exactly. On the
> internet there are photos and explanations about what these things are,
> and where they come from.

This quote clarifies the way in which the internet, and specifically, chat rooms, websites, and mailing lists, provide the infrastructure for a Palestine in cyber space. 'Cyber' and 'offline' Palestine mirrors people's dreams, and reflects their desperate desire for a country. The wide variety of Palestinian websites and internet forums epitomize the different Palestinian cities and communities. And while the flow of emails and increases in interactive mailing lists have given insight into Palestinian opinions, cultures, and ideologies, the voice-chat and web-cams have became the ears, eyes, and voice of Palestinians. Online newsgroups and digital newspapers indicate a

critical Palestinian public sphere and media. In addition, many Palestinians are also engaging in private internet projects like family web logs and mailing lists.

When symbols of Palestinian national identity are represented, promoted, and shared, Palestinians inside and outside come together. As national identity inside the occupied territories changed over the last 4-6 decades, the 'outside' diaspora sometimes found what they heard or saw strange. For them, national Palestinian identity is mostly based on how Palestinian life, culture, and society was when grand/parents left the country; what is being recalled is an idealized Palestinian homeland.

Besides visiting various types of Palestinian websites, Palestinians engage in online chats that cover a variety of subjects such as romances, lifestyle, or sports. Examples like Arab Idols Star Academy contest and the World Cup matches were prominent at the time of fieldwork between 2002 and 2004. People are communicating on different scales; besides the virtual 'global', there are many commonalties between Palestinian and non-Palestinian internet users. The internet as a global network still very much relates to local realities and spaces. Websites with a predominantly local relevance have a focal point through its users and producers. As Kellner argued, global forces influence or structure local situations (2002:295), while local/real time (language/mobility/economic) constraints also impact internet use.

Sanaa, a 16-year-old Palestinian who returned from Italy only two years prior to our interview, was facing problems when surfing the internet. Some of the popular and interactive websites she wanted to view were in Arabic, but as a Palestinian refugee who was raised in Europe she didn't read or write Arabic. The language disability was actually one of the less difficult problems she faced. Sanaa's reflections illustrate how a range of issues fuses when talking about internet use in a country that was just recovering from Israeli siege, civil war, and sectarian politics. She explained that she actually didn't know much about Lebanon before she came to live in the camps. Except from the nice things her grandparents told her over the phone of course. If Italian friends asked about 'their country', she and her sisters would describe how beautiful Lebanon and how exciting Beirut was. When the family was unable to stay in Italy due to tough migration laws and had to return to Bourj al-Barajne camp in Beirut, everything turned out to be different. Life in a camp did not have much to do with the nice descriptions she gave of Lebanon:

> I remember that the first day we returned to Bourj there was no electricity in the camp. It was dark and they kept saying that 'it will come back'. We were surprised and asked our parents 'from where will 'it' come?' Now we are used to it. Sometimes when there is no electricity and TV, I go to the internet café because at least they have the extra [UPS, unlimited power supply] electricity.

Sometimes the internet participation of refugees is an extra challenge in other ways. An innovative example of new opportunities to include Palestinian refugees in the larger political developments was the 'refugee poll'. While they are the

key to a just solution for the conflict, refugees have always been neglected in the decision-making process concerning Palestinian rights. When the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) prepared for new elections in 2002, it was essentially undemocratic because the largest group of its population (refugees and diaspora) were not represented. The idea behind the 'refugee poll' was to present an election poll amongst Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, done by the people themselves, through a survey. Through the internet, election ballots were distributed, and after these were collected from the organizations in the refugee camps, they were to be sent to representatives in the PNA and the UN.

This example also sheds light on general inequalities and internal Palestinian diversity. It is a challenge to include different segments in society, not just the politically active or experienced. Sassen shows that the internet is not autonomous from (state) power in terms of sovereignty and democracy; therefore we must ask critical questions about which actors are gaining influence and whose claims are gaining legitimacy (2005:376). Regardless of the fact that this initiative did not have direct political effect, the refugee's opinion towards the right of return, possible compensation agreement, and general political arguments were at least documented. But as more such local initiatives were developed to use the internet and document their history, there were more challenges to face.

Robert Fisk wrote about one project called *Eye-to-Eye* that had an effect on the Palestinian refugee children of Lebanon.[97]

> There are 32 children in the class, all Palestinian, all new experts on the internet. (…) where do they all come from, I ask? And the answer is, of course, not Lebanon—even though they were born there. "Safad," says one. "Hitin". "Tabaria". "Nimerin." "Sminya," says a little girl wearing a scarf. All are a town that are –or were- in what is present-day Israel.

Though they live in Ein al-Hilwe (Sidon), the largest camp in Lebanon, these children got their own website through which they talk to other children in the world. More such initiatives were taken, either in cooperation with established projects and beneficiaries, or through self-made efforts.

Capturing the history of the Nakba (1948 'catastrophe') and making sure witness accounts and facts will be recorded and remembered is a great concern and motivation for using the internet in these initiatives in the camps in Lebanon, as well as for historians who set up projects with this goal. Smaller projects are also part of the bigger programmes, and while looking more closely I noticed many similar activities in different places. The Beirut based Palestinian NGO Arcpa[98] was involved in a project collecting personal stories related to the Nakba and exile to Lebanon. Subsequently the narratives are digitalized in order to have an accessible and preserved

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[97] The Independent, December 31, 2003. *Web lets Palestinian children find world beyond refugee camp.* There are many more examples, these are some of the one's I encountered that show the role of internet in relation to the questions I raise.

[98] This NGO was involved with a larger Oral History project with researchers Rosemary Sayigh and Diana where conducting hundreds of video and interview recordings about the Nakba experiences.

archive via the internet. Palestinian children interviewed the elderly in the camp who fled in 1948, and are thus responsible for collecting material and conducting the interviews. At the small Arcpa office, the children can use the internet and computer for additional work, and sometimes just for fun. According to Mu'taz Dajani: "This way history will stay alive while Palestinian diasporas share experiences."

The Palestinian organization for children and youth, Nabe', in Nahr al-Bared refugee camp organized the first *Eye-To-Eye* project that Robert Fisk later observed in Ein al-Hilwe. In Nahr al-Bared too, Palestinian children were connected to the world for the first time. Children on the *Save the Children* website give the following message: "We want to tell you what our lives are like as Palestinian refugees using our own photography and stories. We were cut off from young people in other countries, but through *Eye-To-Eye* we can make links worldwide." Because the project was simultaneously presented in Balata refugee camp (Nablus-Palestine), the people in Nahr al-Bared were connected with Palestine. Besides linking Palestinians in Lebanon to Palestine, children actively portrayed stories and pictures about their daily lives and collected testimonies about their family's past. All the stories, pictures, and drawings were then put on the website. By discovering new things, talking about their lives, and making photos of the camp, they could express themselves intensely.

The project thus raised awareness and made a deep impact on the participants who received hundreds of responses from all over the world. The success of, and enthusiasm for, the project motivated Nabe' to set up a computer centre and continue similar internet activities. Yahia explains how one of the indirect results was to alleviate the sense of frustration among refugee children. "A colleague discovered that when the internet is disconnected, the children are more aggressive. When the connection is up, fighting between children goes down." When we talked about the challenges and new possibilities, he was still amazed by the developments that allowed Palestinian children to be able to use the internet and be independently connected to the world.

Ten minutes from Arcpa is the Beirut-based youth and research centre Ajial, another organisation that took the initiative to share and discuss the past and contemporary history with Palestinians abroad. Abu Rabi', founder of Ajial, and former PLO representative in Lebanon, held online meetings with youth in other Arab countries. He did this in order to give alternative analyses and raise awareness about the Palestine-Israeli conflict. Abu Rabi' explained how they worked:

> We used the voice chat and two PCs. We prepared our own youth here, and invited other people for this discussion online. On the other side there were youth from many places in the Arab world – this lecture was about the Right of Return.

In response, Samir, a young Palestinian from the United Arab Emirates who has his own website with a chat room, invited Abu Rabi' to give an online lecture about the situation of Palestinian refugees for his contacts in the UAE. As internet use became more organized, and thus institutionalized, it also became a tool for creating alternatives to the structural problems of Palestinian occupation and immobility.

Whereas internal differences do exist in Palestinian internet use and development, and notwithstanding that the need to use the internet is born of political realities, the internet became an alternative space for displaced Palestinians. The new developments helped to reorder relations between internet users in the Palestinian diaspora. The Israeli occupation, closures, and non-stop curfews changed the meaning of space, place, and time even more. Counterpublic spaces on the internet revealed that what makes the internet attractive is access to a space that offers both information and contact with other Palestinians. Even more successful was Palestinian grassroots internet communication in the form of chatting.

Chatting

While mailing lists were important to counter the information bias and became an alternative voice in the public sphere, the local initiatives provided a framework for refugees to learn about and participate in the new internet possibilities. Direct communication with Palestinians in the diaspora became one of the central activities Palestinians were engaged with. By means of direct (interactive) chatting, these were new ways to overcoming a more personal/individual sense of immobility by participating in private or anonymous mediums. When access became easier and a user-friendly interface popularized, chat and discussion forums boomed and penetrated everyday life. It is important to note that they differ from the more specialized journalistic mailings in the evolution of internet interactivity. While direct and open communication is a unique quality, it is not always considered the right instrument. During an interview with Joki at the office of the *Palestine Monitor* in Ramallah, I asked why they did not have a forum on their websites. She explained that the issue of adding interactive tools to the website was in fact discussed, but the team had reservations and decided not to add a forum page because "most of *Palestine Monitor's* audience are NGO/academic/press, and flashy attributes make our websites seem less serious and informative".

Ramallah Online initiator Maroufski explained during an (online) interview that "the problem of having fully open discussion facilities relates to issues of online flaming and aggression. There are many reasons why forums are a bad idea, and generally most sites do not host them [any more]. Over the years I have had to ban many members for inappropriate behaviour and generally malicious behaviour. (…) The policies currently set in place provide members a sense of security that their opinions will be respected and debated, and not verbally attacked leading to disaster on the website."

There are more practical ways to have direct one-on-one or group interactivity, through accessible forum sites offering Arab chatting programs. The chatting possibilities are numerous and they can take place through many channels and websites such as: *Palvoice, mIRC, Zorono, Al Buraq, Arabia, Maktoob,* and *3oyoon.* Depending on their capabilities, Palestinians could chat in English or Arabic with Latin alphabet, and when the chat programmes became more advanced, many started

chatting in Arabic as well. Most of the chat forums at the time had separate rooms for Palestinians, although anyone can enter; Arabs eager to meet Palestinians, Israelis arguing with Palestinians, the *mukhabarat* (secret service) and so on. Some like *Buraq* and *Maktoob* had a Palestine focus. This was partly due to the fact that the founders were Palestinian and they were the primary chat meeting point for Palestinians and continued to include diaspora Palestinians as in the case of *Al Buraq*.

The first thing I would see when entering public internet places in Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon were the tiny letters and strange looking symbols on the computer screens; I frequently found lots of costumers chatting. Much is possible on the internet because anonymity is its primary characteristic. Chatting on programs like MSN or Yahoo tends to be reserved for closer contacts and family.[99] Other chat programs were usually used to find new (and temporary) contacts. Palestinians that don't have direct internet access can also be part of this virtual community. 15-year-old Samah from Bourj al-Barajne camp often brings her family to the internet café to show them the pictures received from friends and family or to connect them via the web-cam to family members living elsewhere. She described the time that she found one of her uncles online:

> One of the first times I entered the Palestinian chat room was very special. I said 'Hi is there anyone from Palestine?' And I got many reactions. Once I chatted with this man from Nablus and I asked if he happens to know my uncle, who also lives there. And he did. I was so excited and went home to tell my grandmother. The next time I took my whole family with me to the internet café.

The cases I encountered revealed that notions of place and nation are pertinent to Palestinian diasporic communication online. Yet it is relevant to this study to take a closer look at how imagined national identity is configured. A 'common enemy', shared suffering, and lack of mobility give collective national sentiments even greater magnitude. But, putting too much emphasis on a virtual equivalent to the offline became problematic. The examples show that direct contact, territorial land, and 'offline reality', were some of the most significant motivators for internet use. For many, an alternative 'transnational' online public sphere was not satisfactory. 17-year-old Samar from Shatila expressed this 'longing' best when she told me:

> People really want to but don't believe they can go back. If you cut the hope of returning to Palestine you are nobody: a person without a homeland is like a tree without roots.

The point of reference here regards participation in the construction and imagination of a Palestinian identity embedded in particular social political-economic offline contexts.

Aside from bringing family along to an internet café, local online communication can sometimes takes place from home settings in the refugee camp. One December evening in 2003, I was wrapped in a blanket, enjoying the stories and

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[99] Though many of these contacts were made in previous chats.

jokes of my friends' family where I spent my nights during fieldwork in Nahr al-Bared (Tripoli, North Lebanon). The relationships between brothers, sisters, and cousins were very warm and open. It was clear to me that they missed their family that had managed to leave the country to study or work elsewhere. My friend Sanaa' used the computer at home for her work as a teacher and two of the brothers worked in the ICT sector. I was wondering how they would respond if they realized they could have direct internet meetings with their loved one's after only a few technical modifications. Their everyday creativity took me by surprise, because when I suggested the idea to Sanaa', she laughed and told me:

> Oh yes! we already did. I remember one evening we were all sitting like this, with *argilah* [shisha/waterpipe device for smoking], coffee, etc. We invited Shimal's [brother in the Emirates] friends, our cousins, my parents and sisters. We put the speakers on and stayed up all night chatting, sharing jokes, and talking about the latest news in the camp.

Next to these special events people mostly use the internet to check their email or chat. This is not because they were not interested in examining websites and surfing the World Wide Web. In fact, contacts often told me they regretted not being able to spend more time surfing sites; email and chat takes most of the time because by the time they finished with that, the hour budget at the Internet Cafe has expired.

Yahoo Messenger and *Hotmail MSN* services were the most popular instruments for direct chat. Before Hotmail enabled Arabic chat, the Arabic-based chat and email service *Maktoob* had also recognized these potentials. Their primary aim, as Sameeh Toqan explained during an interview in 2003, was "the spread of Arabic language on the internet and to be the force behind facilitating communication among Arabs". They continued to design even better alternatives for Arabs to chat: "We cannot go into competition with MSN or Messenger as they are too strong, but we offer a new email edition that can simultaneously include chat communication with Yahoo and Hotmail." *Maktoob* was actually the fastest growing Arabic website with the largest membership in the 18-35 age group. The clearest virtue of internet use was the virtual mobility that led to new online encounters and virtual transformations, along with its deeper (unintended) effects on Palestinian refugees.

3.4 Living in a Virtual World

> I feel that I want to jump into my computer and run in the fields, or play in the snow; I want to enjoy the beauty of my land. Maybe you have seen many beautiful countries. But this is the first time I see how beautiful my land is. All I want to say is, despite what Israel is doing, we will keep these pictures in our mind. Dali, Shatila, 2004.

Dali from Shatila told me about the moment she received a collection of pictures by email. The pictures showed places in Palestine. Her reconnection with Palestinian soil was a virtual experience through a selection of picturesque images that looked like

postcard images. She forwarded them to her friends with the title 'Here is our past, present, and future' and the above quote attached. Through the internet these symbols and personal expressions—embedded, shaped, and re-signified in locally specific ways, found their way into a global cyber space. However, rather than idealizing the online, it is important to remember that the virtual is neither a free 'global village', nor a 'substitute'. Instead of assuming computer-mediated relations to be as significant as everyday face-to-face contact, virtual communities and spaces encourage collective strength and support as well as exclusion and restriction - just like in everyday life.

The internet's importance to diasporic communities lies in the fact that the online has the potential to include those otherwise cut off, absent, or far away. I want to understand what this means for exiled Palestinian diasporas', those for whom the 'offline' nation is unavailable and who are left with strong feelings of nostalgia. It is important to remember that online communication styles are sometimes 'involuntary' (the only alternative communication available). As Abu Muzahed told me during an interview:

> The Intifada gave additional momentum to the impact of the internet in peoples' personal and social life. People felt they deserved to live and dream. They were not able to do so in actual life, so they found a substitute for this on the net.

Palestinian transformations in such spatial ways therefore need to be viewed critically. After having introduced the birth of online mobility and communication, it is also important to present the unintended or dark side of increasing internet mobility and communication. To avoid simplistic conclusions about the disappearance of 'real' distance and locality, and to better understand how people are linked to the internet, I use the concept of 'escapism'. Although I do not necessarily use escapism in its overtly pessimistic sense, this complex concept can be useful in placing online experience in a broader context. First I will look at the new online encounters and zoom into peoples experiences in the camps. The examples of online escapism I encountered particularly seemed to be caused by the need to escape everyday miseries by seeking online pleasures.

Online Traversals as Social Outlet

In 2000, Maisoon, a Palestinian volunteer working in Shatila refugee camp, gathered a group of youngsters and tried to connect them with refugees in the West Bank camp of Dheisheh. The children initially communicated with each other through the volunteer's own email account; she would print out the letters and deliver them to the youth. In 2001, 14 and 13 year old Samer and Shiraz from Shatila described to me how they started a unique relationship with members of Dheisheh camp:

> We got to know each other by writing emails and became friends. Now it is more then friendship, we are like brothers and sisters...Everybody in our group has a friend in Dheisheh. We talk about personal things and problems, about what we are doing and our study. And we email each

other on birthdays, Ramadan, and al-Eid.

> A week ago we emailed our friends in Dheisheh and told them that we memorialized the Sabra and Shatila massacre that happened exactly 20 years ago and that we had a big demonstration.

Their knowledge developed since they began using the internet. Making their own camp websites was one of Shiraz's major interests. She helped write stories about their life in the camp, and thought about ways to design the homepage. Besides communicating with their 'brothers and sisters' in Palestine, these youngsters use the internet to reach the outside world and express their grievances. When asked about their motivation for having a website, Samer and Shiraz explained:

> To let our voice be heard, to let people know how we are living, what our feelings are. It's important, we already know how they live [in the West], and they must also know how we live. Then maybe they will know more about Palestinian history and our rights.

> It is to let people know that we still hope to return to Palestine and that living in the camps is different then living in Palestine. We want to have a positive relation [with the world] and work together in order to return.

At the time it seemed that chatting was one of the most popular activities on the net among camp youth. Pop culture and romance are favourite topics, but the political situation also dominated their style and discourse. Eventually, what most Palestinians want is to be heard and break through the walls that exclude them from political debate or decision-making. When questioned whom in particular they like to chat with, and about what, many interviewees answered that next to Palestinians, Israelis are their favourite. Shiraz from Shatila was explicit about it:

> Once I fought with an Israeli woman on mIRC. She said that there is no country called Palestine, and that all Palestinians are terrorists. I said, "Than you do think there are 'Palestinians' from a country called Palestine'? She said that Palestinians are terrorists because they bomb themselves. I said it was the only way to make Israel give us our freedom. She said 'they should kill the soldiers, not the civilians'. I said, "Many Israeli civilians have weapons and kill Palestinians too or take other peoples' houses and steal the best places in Palestine". I was a bit rude, but at the end I felt stronger."

Contact grew even stronger between camps in Lebanon and Palestine, and after having only been in touch by email, the youth were rewarded. After the final Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000, both camps organized to meet at the border. The children that chatted and emailed for a year, now met each other face-to-face. Refugees from both sides shouted their family names, some held up pictures of missing relatives. The refugees from Lebanon tasted olives (and even sand) that the refugees from the West Bank brought them.[100] These random and spontaneous

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[100] Some of the stories described here by the children interviewed can also be seen in a documentary by Lebanese filmmaker May Masri, "Frontiers of dreams and Fears" 2001.

meetings were soon replaced by coordinated visits, organized by Palestinian committees and NGOs on both sides of the dividing fence. But it wasn't long before the Israeli army intervened. According to Muataz, coordinator of one of the projects in a refugee camp, this development should be viewed carefully. He was concerned that the close connections would create a negative impact on the children:

> The presents that were given at the [Lebanese-Israeli] borders represented the soil: olives, oil, and bread. Hope of return is revived by the internet and eventually also with physical contacts. But the combination of a confrontation with the land and their unfulfilled hopes is precarious. First there was one fence so people could stand very close, touch, hug, and kiss one another. Then they made another fence, which made it difficult to meet physically, or give each other presents. When the refugees tried to break through anyway, Israeli soldiers reacted with violence. Eventually they even divided the borders with a no-man's-land in between making it impossible to meet. People from both sides could only shout at each other from a distance. While the Intifada continued, it was prohibited to visit the borders and the soldiers shot anyone who tried.

The territorial relation with Palestine and its history proved to be important for continuing internet activities. Throughout this project, and after the border meetings, the children's longing for historical Palestine, its land, houses, and trees was stronger than before. The fear expressed by different organizers is that with the increased communication, the desire to return to Palestine will be stronger, while a solution for the refugees is farther away than ever.

Virtual Escapism

Palestinians who connect with family in other parts of the world use the internet as a practical solution for a community that is still divided. Reconnections take place with the land by those who have never been there before but only imagined it. The idea of escapism is of extra importance with regards to immobility because Palestinian conditions strengthen the double-edged characteristic of escapism. Maps, pictures, audio sound, and other references to Palestine and the 1948 Nakba, fused with online imagination of collective Palestinian identity, show the juxtaposition of the virtual and the real. Nevertheless, bypassing colonial occupation where hardcore offline realities are employed to dominate and oppress is not possible. The discovery of online alternatives may for example have unexpected counter effects, leading away from the goal. As Rannia from Jordan told me about her attempts to help Palestine:

> There is a danger that after spending two hours emailing you think you've done the fight for the Palestinian cause for that day. And so you might not go out and participate in a demonstration, which might have a more direct effect. Alternatives are those who combine these efforts and tools, like Al Awda [international organisation for the Right of Return] who held successful demonstrations because of their mobilizations on the internet. Again, it's a tool and you need to look at it in that perspective. Internet is not going to save Palestine, but it's going to contribute to the liberation of

Palestine. Had it not happened, I'm sure it would have been much worse.

Overall, the intensity and frequency of internet communication concerning the Intifada saw a decrease over the past five years. The (worsening) Intifada can have radicalizing as well as demoralizing and alienating effects on internet use. For some Palestinians the developments translated into political participation and eagerness, for others it eventually led to more frustration and sometimes fatalism leading to rejection. Nuhad in Shatila Camp decided she will no longer open/receive emails with images of massacres. She only wanted 'softer' pictures such as of stone throwers or Palestinian folklore, or emails with Palestinian songs. I found this change in attitude among other Palestinians I interviewed as well because the priorities of online use are often shaped by the political developments of a particular moment.

Nuhad's shift in opinion about pictures and images of the Intifada confirmed that the situation was getting hopeless and many people got politically exhausted. It is apparent that the political developments push/pull radicalisation among internet users. Their parallel life in the virtual world allows them to escape their everyday living conditions and, at the same time, confronts them with a world that could have been theirs. Dali once told me that the internet was for her like a glass wall, referring to her internet boyfriend from Gaza: "I only wish to see him for real but I can't. It's like I can see him but I cannot touch him. It makes it even worse sometimes". Escapism is fuelled by isolation, entrapment, boredom, humiliation, and homesickness.

Abu Mujahed, an active organiser at a youth centre in Shatila refugee camp, also explained why a turn to internet has a special meaning for the Palestinians in Lebanon's' refugee camps. The Lebanese government provides no significant services for the camps because:

> The government treats the camp like a leaf in autumn–they think 'just leave it and it will fall off by itself'. They know how miserable and inhumane the situation in the camp is—without basic education or healthcare. And that there are criminals and drug addicts hiding in the camps. They know but they just leave it until it will collapse by itself. I think that's why we find girls and boys going to the Internet so much. They escape to another world. One writes love letters, others discuss politics, or even looking for pornography. They are spending time there [online], to run away from reality here.

Community leaders like Dajani fear that the increased communication and desire to return to Palestine might lead to negative consequences. Disappointment and disillusionment might result in depression and therefore "sometimes it's better not to know". Moreover, online escapism can cause feelings of 'alienation' because virtual participation often means individual experience, increasing the sense of loneliness or exclusion because of a lack of face-to-face contact.

Some of those who wanted to use internet in the camp faced more difficulties, reminding us, again, that the realities faced by Palestinian refugees cannot

be overcome merely by escaping into the internet. As Samer in Shatila then told me during one of our first meetings:

> When I asked for internet at home the company agreed. But when they saw my address and I said 'in the camp' they said 'sorry we can't connect you'. They are scared of the camps.

The 'wired' community still excludes. Moreover, instead of turning virtual reality into computer networked 'flows' of minds and emotions, Zizek (1997:154) warned that the overwhelming internet choices may lead to the impossibility of choice. The internet may eventually remove the user from offline public and private spheres.

However, little empirical research, with the exception of Mark Griffiths work (2000, 2006) in which he critically assesses the impact of excessive internet use, is done on internet pathologies such as addiction. Notwithstanding the inability/in access to face-to-face meetings/traveling/visiting as a result of colonial political conditions, virtual escapism may also provide collective solitude through imaginative experiences, or distraction and relief from reality. In Chapters One and Two I proposed a dialectic assessment of the utopian/dystopian impact of the internet and escapism. Escapism can be both negative/unhealthy (commercial escapism), as well as positive/healthy (self-generated escapism) strategies. Escapism can be understood in its passive, active, evasive, or extreme forms including: leisure online activities as virtual breaks from a daily reality that shaped by poverty or occupation; simulating participation in the Intifada through combat games; and creating a reality that is realistically not available.

In fact, not all forms of escape represent escapism. According to Evans "Escapism as a psychological trail or condition is not very conducive to social change and only cements the conditions that caused it in the first place. If no one acts the status quo remains the same." (2001:67). The concept of 'transcendence' is simultaneously analogous to and different from escapism; it does not connote flight from everyday life challenges, but a rising above them. There also exists a valuable goal-oriented escapism (Evans 2001:70), motivated by the aim to overcome unpleasant practices, to replace immobility with virtual mobility, to substitute isolation with internet connectivity, or overcome loneliness with online love.

As illustrated in this, and subsequent chapters, the virtual *conveys* rather than *escapes* the real in the diasporic Palestinian context. Combat games, online mobilization, or hacktivism are some of the political examples. From interviews with young Palestinians (mostly boys) involved with combat games, I got the impression that it is at least temporarily satisfying. For some, this political escapism also increased a sense of isolation. The flip side of the coin of internet participation, or the illusion of participation, is the unfulfilling outcome and can cause further disillusionment.

Alienation can be fueled by *denial*. Evens (2001:80), describes different ways that escapism can turn into denial or might even cause harm. The individual sense of alienation became clear to me in the discussions with Abu Muzahed about the impact of internet on youth in the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon. In the preceding quotes he conveyed that overuse of online activities and excessive correspondence

with Palestine can be unhealthy as they may increase depression. Escapism can be seen as anathema to dissent/protest since it negate the need for social change—but in another it can also be a sign of social/intellectual awareness, or another way of coping with reality. The latter, above all, makes sense when escape is not an option.[101] Yet mobility, with all its pros, cons and uncertainties, exists for Palestinians for the first time through the internet. These analyses thus capture the first reactions and experiences with internet and the novelty of online communication.

3.5 Conclusion

In contrast to the 'official' debates in public spheres, the local and critical Palestinian voices carried by interactive online communication became more visible and loaded. For communities excluded from national autonomy and geographically divided or exiled, the internet allowed individuals or groups to exercise and display their identity. The Israeli government imposes censorship on information flow into occupied territories, even after Oslo. Both the flow of people and the flow of information are thus controlled. This was partly overcome by the birth of transnational communication and grassroots initiatives and projects such as the creation of online discussions by and for Palestinians.

Though the impact of online traversals might change when the internet becomes a normalized medium, people's responses, stories, and encounters from Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan, led me to understand what the internet meant in a socio-political context marked by the Palestinian struggle for self-determination in the early phase of the Intifada. Much of my research belongs to a time when the internet was still a novelty for Palestinians. Nevertheless, the euphoria regarding the impact of the internet is still meaningful because of the political impact that crossing virtual boundaries implies for those still lacking alternatives.

The internet helps to overcome immobility through two related subjects: communication and content. Palestinians can communicate with each other through the internet and they do this from different places and at the same time. This development is a new phenomenon, possible for the first time since 1948 and very significant as communication is often based on the fact that they are part of Palestinian diasporas. The content is also important. Through online discussions and virtual traversals the creation and imagination of national identity is practiced in everyday-life. Meanwhile, the direct and cross-levelled contact also led to clashes. These tensions reflect class and refugee consciousness, re-examining notions of Palestinian unity.

Palestinian publishers, commercial business enterprises, and governments, clearly capitalized on the possibilities of the internet. Additionally, virtual journeys

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[101] 'Simulation' is a concept closely related to escapism, but since the postmodern turn in the social sciences, it often carries a pessimistic connotation and refers to a dystopian, invented, and fake dynamic. Jean Baudrillard's writing about simulation and fantasy in the post-industrial context are a good example.

across borders have had a tremendous impact in breaking the isolation and subsequent alienation from mainstream Palestinian decision-making of Palestinian refugees. Moreover, it greatly enhanced the confidence of the refugee community as a whole, helping to re-assert the refugee population and independent Palestinian state as a central axis of Palestinian society.

Online traversals and practices have offline repercussions in the reconstruction of existing national identities. Online traversals cannot overcome all obstacles in the occupied territories; important equipment for the development of the Palestinian ICT sector was often withheld at the borders by Israeli military or refused passage through checkpoints. And the diaspora is still scattered over Egypt, Lebanon, Tunis, and Jordan. But many Palestinians regard themselves as belonging to one nation and continue to express their wish for return and this is one of their main topics of discussions on the internet. The internet has strengthened Palestinian national identity and simultaneously revived a political objective for an independent state. This, in due course, confirmed the dialectic between nation and state; an important topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Virtual space—Territorial place:
Imagined Nation and State Making

"Li kull al-nas watanun ya'ishuna fihi, wa lakin nahnu lana watanun ya'ishu fina." ["All People have a country to live in, but we have a country living inside us."] – Dali, Shatila Camp, November 2003

4.1 Introduction

Internet technologies offer an alternative to lack of mobility and also construct new styles of connectivity. Such new transnational communication tools, combined with grass-roots Palestinian interactivity, redefine the relation between territorial place and virtual space. This relation is very complex in the Palestinian context, especially because it is a constant reminder of the absence of a shared common territorial place. These new innovations thus impact the Palestinian self-identification while representing a collective imagined nation.

When we met in Shatila refugee camp (Beirut) in 2003, 19-year-old Dali shared with me what having a nation and country means to her. During many talks with her and her friends, we discussed issues varying from life in the camp to their personal experiences on the internet. Contact between us increased; we became friends, exchanged our personal email addresses, and added each other to our Hotmail MSN lists. The first time we met online, when I was back in Amsterdam, we enthusiastically greeted one another and started chatting. I was intrigued by the long and poetic nickname she chose to identify herself with on MSN, translated in the opening quote above. I asked what she meant by 'her country living inside her'; she explained that it represented an Arabic expression related to the Nakba and Palestinian diaspora. Dali used it as her online nickname, her chat identity: "Many people don't realize what it means because they are used to having a country; we do not have this luxury. But, even though we don't have a country, it lives very strongly inside of us."

Dali's example makes concrete how electronic media becomes a tool for identifying, representing, and connecting people and communities. Being denied civil rights and citizenship, then claiming and disseminating a national identity via an 'electronic passport' through the internet, signifies the fusion of politics and (mass-mediated practices in concrete ways. The juxtaposition of transnational virtual spaces and local territorial places through internet practices challenged important empirical notions regarding the 'tension' between state, nation, and (imagined) community. On the one hand, the internet allows communication between Palestinians that was not possible before, connecting politics and media, or the virtual and the real. On the other hand, the often celebrated free-flow of information and mobility in 'new' networked and transnational societies are heavily contrasted by everyday reality.

Chapter Three outlined the first tension of this analysis: mobility in the context of diaspora and exile. This chapter questions concrete problems of an occupied and exiled community in terms of place and space - the second tension. Dali and her friends in Shatila illustrate that national consciousness is not determined by a sovereign state or territorial custody. Despite this, several examples in this chapter demonstrate that the nation-state is nonetheless a potent frame of reference in the analyses of new media and society. The nation-state is clearly a prime actor in the creation and regulation of media networks (Abu-Lughod 2002:11). 'Classic' media production (television, newspapers) in particular, functions within the context of the nation and is guarded by state hegemony.

The notion of the nation-state is a compelling element of media and Palestinian political identity, especially because of its relation to media infrastructure and access. With regards to the formation of modern nation-states in the colonial past, Benedict Anderson (1991) shows how developments in print and mass media profoundly influence internal social relations and collective identity (Chapter Two). Khalidi (1997) studied local Arab Palestinian press and showed that the Palestinian identity of the educated elite was well grounded during the Mandate period, contrary to the belief that Palestinian identity only arose as a response to Zionism.[102] But this analysis can also be extended to 'new' media productions such as the internet.

Castells (1997/2001) outlines a shift in social structures motivated by *new* technological globalization and suggests a different development. Unlike the classic, hierarchically organized, media schemes via national/state lines, technological developments seem to have a different and decentralized impact on, and may even engineer, society. Despite these different perspectives, and the fact that neither Castells nor Anderson address the Palestinian diaspora specifically, they do provide resources to question *how* ideas or spaces can 'flow' in the Palestinian context. These somewhat conflicting frameworks also trigger new empirical questions when, for instance, referring generally to nation-state concepts.

In dispersed, diasporic, or occupied contexts, we are confronted with different levels of a dilemma. What state is there for Palestinian media production? A related question is: what exactly is framed as the national point of reference for a community so fragmented and dispersed after 60 years of exile? Colonialism and apartheid are prime references regarding the relation between electronic media and Palestinian society.[103] Not only did Palestinians lose their territory through colonial

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[102] Although Zionism was the primary 'other' that strengthened Palestinian national consciousness, at the same time people in the Middle East imagined themselves as part of a sovereign entity and identified with the new states created by the imperial partitions of WWI.

[103] It was not until 1988 that Israelis were barred from running 'Jews Only' job ads. Israeli economy could survive this, usually through the Israeli policy of importing large numbers of East European Jews, Asian migrant workers, and allowing guest workers from Latin America to function as cheap labour. See *Christian Aliens in the Jewish State* by Barak Kalir (2006). This is important when compared to the other main example of racialised occupation, South Africa, where the blacks outnumbered the whites and their role as a working class segment offered more potential means of protest. Whereas occupation is an acceptable reference, colonial occupation is often regarded as something of the past. But see for instance Derek

occupation, their historic presence is also denied in the propagated myth that Palestine is 'a land without a people for a people without a land.' (Chapter Two) The rise of resistance movements, shared feelings of uprooted-ness, and collective solidarity strengthened Palestinian community networks and national identity, sometimes rendering regional or class differences secondary. The everyday experiences of diaspora communities, and the weak position of stateless people, are significant to the formation of Palestinian identity. I am not referring to identity in the existential but in the collective sense, about coming together, sharing a platform, and discussing the Right of Return, or exchanging everyday life experiences. Thus, rather than dismissing the notion of national identity, I argue that an *anti-colonial* nationalism is more appropriate for framing occupation and the diasporic condition.

The (online) constructed views about Palestinian collective identity and belonging were greatly impacted by the political upsurge since 2000. While technological instruments strengthened the imagined community, they were fused with experiences on the ground. The Intifada boosted and framed much of the online interactions. In this chapter I describe the kinds of Palestinian "imaginations" and political identifications that the internet facilitates, especially in connection with the Intifada. After a short outline of Palestinian identity and its effect on the imagined nation without a state, I will examine what 'kind' of imagined national community was promulgated. This 'online public sphere' managed to go beyond the borders that strictly divide Palestinians from one another. I will illustrate how the Palestinian nation is imagined through the new online encounters and show how these new and increasing interactions alter people's ideals vis-à-vis the nation.

4.2 Counter Narratives

> Do we exist? What proof do we have? The further we get from the Palestine of our past, the more precarious our status, the more disrupted our being, the more intermittent our presence. When did we become a people? When did we stop being one? Or are we in the process of becoming one? (…) Are there really such things as Palestinian embraces, or are they simply intimacy and embraces - experiences common to everyone, neither politically significant nor particular to a nation or a people? - Edward Said (*After the last sky*, 1986).

Through the query about the meaning of "Palestinianess" by Edward Said, I wish to illustrate the process of 'becoming' while at the same time 'preserving' a nation. Said sees identity, or the making of identity, as a dynamic process and evokes questions about how people's dreams about the land are imagined, constructed, and, contested. My intention is to trace how "Palestinianess" is referred to in cyber space by treating internet technology as one of the structures of the (diasporic) nation-building process.

Gregory's (2004) *The colonial present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* Blackwell 2004, about how to understand current colonial occupation.

It became instantaneously clear to me that online-mediated communications were shaped by intense political developments. On the 29th of September the Second (al-Aqsa) Intifada broke out, one way or another affecting Palestinians wherever they were. A historical reference helps us understand how structural forces impact local developments as national identities are linked to constantly changing processes.

I will start this section by returning to the importance of national identity as a basic premise and unravel some of the contextual difficulties in this study. I will then show how Palestinian identity is formed around anti-colonial nationalism, as a nation without a state with an imagined nation/community facilitated by the internet. In this context I will shed light on the potentially paradoxical online Palestinian identity.

Imagined Community (without a State)

Internet use is shaped by the opportunities that it offers for direct communication and online mobility. Such communication is, in turn, a key element in the virtual community that has arisen in Palestine because the internet has provided a medium in which direct participation is possible and allowed. Thus, before we are able to study collective (imagined) identity in relation to electronic media, it is important to realize that Palestinian national identity is shaped by exile and statelessness.

Palestine was fragmented and rendered a nation of displaced refugees; it is crucial to keep in mind the uniqueness of the settler/colonial project in Palestine. Shohat (1989) explains how Palestinians are systematically excluded from all facets of society. It is therefore important to distinguish between colonial oppression - mainly based on exploitation and racist claims of superiority, and Zionist oppression - linked to a particular type of exclusion and colonial occupation. This is clear in the Palestinian persistence vis-à-vis the forming and maintenance of Palestinian identity, language, religion, and resistance movements. Both the colonial and revolutionary histories are important components of the collective self-identity. According to Khalidi (1997), Palestinian identifies him/herself in a different way:

> The Frenchwoman would refer her identity in some measure to a powerful, generations-old 'historical' narrative of 'Frenchness'. In contrast, given the lack of such a state or unified educational system, the Palestinian would be more likely to refer identity to a *number* of 'historical' narratives, each carrying a different valence and a somewhat different message' (1997:146).

Khalidi furthermore explains how Palestinians do not form a group with an independent history, but exist in relation to 'the other's' history. Self-definition takes place in relation to 'the other' because Palestinians have to fight for recognition vis-à-vis 'the other' by which they are contested as a people. The remark made by the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir—that there are no Palestinians—influenced public discourse and self-identity. Moreover, this logic displays an attitude towards Palestinians that has over time become commonplace in the Western world (Khalidi

1997:147). The 'Palestinian nation' is 'nation-less' since a territorial or judiciary framework is absent. Eriksen (1993:14) calls Palestinians a 'non-state' people, like the Kurds and Sikhs. Through colonial subjugation, the expression of national identity becomes a form of political expression. As Shulz (1999) and Y. Sayigh (1997) have noted, Palestinian collective identity, nationalism, and struggle are interrelated. And the combination of colonialism and occupation mean that Palestinians cannot exercise potential economic power, especially as they are cut off from the labour force.

But it is also important to note that Palestinians are not just passive subjects (Kimmerling 2000:71). The strong Palestinian national identity is connected with a Palestinian popular resistance. The arguments of Eriksen, Kimmerling, or Khalidi do not imply that Palestinian identity is a unique category. Palestinian identity means different things for different people in different contexts. National identity does not assume a collective experience or vision regarding nation-building, but includes internal differences. Hammami (1997) pictured how Palestinian women experienced this in the course of the First Intifada when gender liberation and national liberation clashed around the issue of the *hidjab* (headscarf).

It is crucial to look at Palestinians' self-definition in the context of stigmatized or internally contradicting views. Kimmerling analyzed expressions of Palestinian collective identity (1993/2000) by examining degrees of loyalty expressed towards the Arab nation, Islamic nation, Palestinian nation, or their local/family bonds. Political identity was clearly prompted by a *al-qawmiyya al-'arabiyya* (pan-Arab nationalism) *al-qawmiyya al-wataniyya* (Palestinian).[104] Palestinian identity changed according to regional conflicts and events on the ground, and is then reshaped by external events. For example, the defeat of Pan-Arabism and the general collapse of the secular left after the Cold War channelled Palestinian resistance and identity from a secular nationalist, to a more Islamist, framework. Actually, this religious/Islamic presence represents a specific national political identity.

Islamic parties and movements have also become more popular as a result of their political consistency or explicit discourse and activism, sometimes more than for their ideological content: it could be said that national politics became more *Islamized*. The public perception is that these Political/Islamist parties and activists continued to resist occupation by rejecting the failing peace process, and daring to revenge Israeli attacks. The fact that Hamas provided basic healthcare and education in the poor refugee camps, while Fatah was increasingly associated with political impotence and corruption, made Hamas the strongest political and ideological alternative over the years (Hroub 2000, 2006).

Critical analyses are even more needed because the concept of identity is often used in researching internal differences within communities. The academic and popular fixation with ethnic identity in the European context may lead to stereotypes;

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[104] Al qawmi al arabiya (Pan-Arab nationhood) was very popular during the 50's and 60's when the Egyptian president Jamal Abdel Nasser mobilized for anti-imperialist/unified Arab coexistence. Both Qawmi (Arab-nationalist) and Watani (Palestinian-nationalist) translate into English as "nationalist" but the first is connected to pan-Arabism while the second to nation-states (patriotism).

in fact, abstract use of the concept of identity will hardly lead to valuable deconstruction (Essed and Nikamo 2005).[105] Stuart Hall clearly argued for a non-essentialist analysis in academia. He points to a social reality wherein identities and cultures are not essentially located in this ethnicity or that culture, but are the effect of history and culture, forged through collective memory and narrative. In this understanding, identities are not straightforwardly preserved (or lost). From a similar critical understanding I also underline that identity has multiple characteristics and is part of a constantly developing process. During an interview in November 2002, Sam Bahour said that Palestinians are "not just about politics" and he took the initiative to set up a website with the acronym PEBBLES: politics, economy, business, bizarre, lifestyle, entertainment, sports; "While we have all of this as Palestinians, the last suicide attack is the only thing people in the West seem to associate with Palestine."

Yet, when the legitimacy of nation and identity is put in question it is clear that 'the other' is important; the 'other' unites people in the face of a threat to existence and self-determination. The history of forced exile and uprisings illustrate that anti-colonial frameworks and nationalist discourses matter greatly to a multiple Palestinian identity. Therefore, besides the necessary critique regarding essentialist claims of (ethnic) identity (cf. Baumann 1999:136) we should note that nationally-motivated identity prevails in contexts where it is contested, denied, and deprived of an independent territory/nation-state. That is why non-state communities maintain a strong degree of independence (Eriksen 1993:125), both despite *and* because of injustice and forced displacement. The aforementioned myth of 'a land without a people' is the greatest denial, and the strongest element shaping a common/collective national identity.

Nakba denial—Nakba remembrance

Academic use of historical archives on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict strengthened the myth about the birth of the Israeli state. This is one of the most striking examples of how national imagination and political identity can be manipulated by states. Yet the release of previously unavailable documents could tarnish the authoritative nationalist narratives of Israel's foundation. Tania Forte eloquently reveals a "fluid relation between the security apparatus and many members of the faculty department" at Israeli universities (2003:223). The Israeli pretext for land expropriation and forced exile shaped an 'us vs. them' dichotomy in constructing a national 'other'. This is particularly true because the notion of state security is strongly linked to the notion of national identity (Forte 2003:216). However, patriotic

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[105] Problems of Western/"autochtone" youth are commonly related to socio-economic issues or the dominant community considered as diverse and representing many social classes/subcultures. But there are essentialist arguments that start from a culturalist point of view when Muslims or minorities are debate (c.f. critical response on such fixed understandings in the Dutch context Wekker, Essed, Ghorashi, Sunier and Baumann.

academic practices were partly challenged by 'New Historians' like Morris and Pappe, among the first to shed light on the framework that shaped Palestinian national identity.

Sa'di (2002) recalls that identity is conjured through both top-down and bottom-up processes. 'Belonging' and a sense of imagined community is (re)produced through (invented) traditions, commemorations, national canons, and museums. Similarly, a 'nationalization' of communities is also generated through *localized* experiences, practices, and sentiments. Sa'di even questions the commonly used (abstract) analyses of national identity; for him the social and spatial/local context are *the* constitutive dimensions because these will finally give meaning to concepts like national identity and nationalism. This dynamic is relevant with reference to one framework in particular: the 1948 al-Nakba. Even after the defeat of the 1967 war (al-Naksa), "Black September", Land Day, the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, the First Intifada, etc., al-Nakbah has remained the main site of Palestinian collective memory (:195).

Exiled, occupied, denied, and lacking national institutions and archives, colonized people resort to different manners of identity construction. Identity is ultimately connected with the Nakba, or with remembering the Nakba, as it is the strongest Palestinian icon symbolizing the "tragic fate of men and women whose lives had been shattered, and about their descendents who continue to suffer its consequences." (Sa'di:176). A sense of homelessness connects the Palestinians' collective consciousness. Sa'di sees the Nakba as an *anticlimax*, a promise of independence that turned into a nightmare (:186). Palestine is not like the 'classic', colonized countries that experienced struggle and independence as part of a general decolonization process.

Palestinians began to use Nakba as a temporal reference, as both a beginning and an end of something. The Nakba has thus become a constitutive element of Palestinian identity. According to Sa'di it is "a Palestinian event and a site of Palestinian collective memory; it connects all Palestinians to a specific point in time that has become for them an "eternal present" (:177). There are different ways to study Palestinian (imagined) community/identity through the prism of al-Nakba. This subject can be found in Palestinian literature in the luminous works of Ghassan Khanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, or Edward Said. Sa'di looked at a number of photographic books attempting to picture or conjure the feeling of how Palestine was *before* the Nakba and Ihab Saloul's unique research work deals with the cultural memory of al-Nakba in present Palestinian exilic consciousness through an analysis of literary, filmic, and oral narratives of different generations.[106] These stories and recollections of everyday individual and community life co-produce the national collective narrative.

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[106] Saloul, Ihab, *Telling Memories: Al-nakba in Palestinian Exilic Narratives* (2008). He also deals with the issue of denial and remembrance of Al Nakba, especially chapters two ("Out of Home: On the Balconies of Our Houses in Exile") and four ("Performative Narrativity and Identity in 1948").

In conjunction with Sa'di's call for a bottom-up approach, the construction of national identity 'from below' is an important perspective due to political shifts 'from above'.[107] Palestinian politics during the transformation of the PLO between 1982 and 1993 witnessed a shift from 'resistance' to 'appeasement'. While Palestinians in the Occupied Territories organized a massive uprising in the First Intifada, the officials in exile in Tunis ultimately decided the political course of action, thereby contributing to a weakening of collective political unity (Chapter One). Shifts in political discourse impact the (political) content of literature as an important contributor in the process of imagined community; literary projects represent a particular moment (Hassan 2003). For instance, Hassan connects Jayyusi's important work *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* to the 'politics of appeasement' as it came out in 1992 coinciding with Oslo. (:22).[108] The reflection of political realities in various media styles and technologies is especially apparent when we consider the internet.

Where sovereignty is lacking offline, it is perceived in cyber space. Online interactivity provided new spaces for solidarity between Palestinian diasporas. Through the Iranian online ethnography of www.iranian.com, Khosravi (2001) discussed how the internet reshaped the landscape of the Iranian diaspora. This relationship between diaspora and homeland led to the creation of a transnational public sphere and offered Iranians online anonymity. It is an alternative to the traditional public sphere, a space marked by social segregation, political tensions, and state control, especially in host countries where the exiled are constantly treated as immigrants and not full participants in the public sphere. The internet is not a *tabula rasa*, but fuelled by shared histories such as al-Nakba. This alternative space is neither completely new, nor a strict replica of the imagined Palestinian nation, but it assumes the re-structuring, re-imagining, and re-constructing of a nation in flux between contemporary and historical memories and symbols.

An interesting element in Khosravi's narrative is how people remember *pre-revolution Iran. Palestinians also express a strong online nostalgia for the past. An important difference however, is that Iranians are not confronted with a colonial context, thus for more than 60 years Palestinians cannot return even if they wanted to; they are not exiled by their political stance as in Iran, but by their ethnicity. This difference seems to make an alternative (virtual) return to the homeland more important for Palestinians. The expression of national identity through online encounters seems more poignant in the context of actual land loss and a colonizing

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[107] The books Sa'di analyzes are, for example, Jaffa, the Perfume of a City with personal testimonies like that of Shafiq Al Hout and Yousef Haikel by Hisham Sharabi (1991), and Walid Khalidi's (1991) Before their diaspora: a photographic history of the Palestinians 1876-1948. In fact, these books also serve as sites of collective memory and reconstruction of the past. However, as Moors (2001) argued, Walid Khalidi discusses a selective visual representation of the past and Palestinian identity because he mainly refers to sources and images of the Palestinian upper-class.

[108] He sees the (involuntary) repositioning of Palestinian literature in terms of modernist aesthetics as opposed to resistance. This seems to support a (false) polarity between politics and aesthetics by explaining the under-representation of writers from 'inside' not in terms of the political conditions but through a judgment of quality and aesthetics (:21).

'other'. For Palestinians in the occupied homeland, the internet very strongly meant a new way to talk about what was occurring on the ground, and for Palestinians in the diaspora the internet presented a new medium to increase communication with other Palestinians and knowledge about the homeland.

The uprooting of Palestinians in 1948 that led to disperse the Palestinian diaspora meant the loss of security that states could provide their citizens. A refugee status for Palestinians meant being treated as second-class citizens without many basic rights, and being exposed to numerous social, political, and economic problems like unemployment and inadequate educational and medical services (Ajial 2001). A just solution for the refugees is a central issue leading to repeated political deadlocks during negotiations and massive uprisings. This is clearly indicated by the Second Intifada coinciding with a massive turn to the internet.

Intifada Boost

> That day [29/09/2000] I didn't feel like seeing anyone. I went home, my father was there. He has been through these things before – war, revolution, invasions. But for me, this was all new, so shocking. Seeing those scenes of killings and bombings in Palestine made me so angry. Anyway, I had beaten up my brother because I was so angry, and then my father hit me. So I ran away, for the first time. I went to my grandfather's house where I slept on the roof, I was so angry.
>
> – Rami, Nahr al-Bared 2004.

As everyday-life has its own (historic) logic, the outbreak of the Second Intifada represented (and activated) the urge among Palestinians to resist the status quo. The Intifada eventually mobilized worldwide support, and was the impetus for Palestinian internet use. In Lebanon, a similar political push towards the internet had already taken place after the liberation of South-Lebanon in May 2000, five months before the Intifada. Disseminating information and images about the Israeli retreat from Lebanon was a demarcation point (Gonzales 2001).[109] In Palestine, the need for internet was enhanced by closures and curfews. As Karma from Ramallah explained to me, "The curfews without the internet would have been a real nightmare for me. And if I didn't have my *Hear Palestine* to work on, I would probably have gone mad, or perhaps become like those suicide activists." 16-year-old Shaker in Beirut told me that, "Watching news was like breakfast, lunch, and dinner, checking the internet and Palestinian websites was as necessary as having your three meals." The Intifada provided a reorientation towards the Palestinian territories among Palestinians in the diaspora.

Talks with Palestinians in the refugee camps taught me how important it is to distinguish between Palestinians that were present in the territorial 'centre' of the

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[109] According to Gonzales the May 2000 Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon increased internet usage by 60 %. This coincided with the rebuilding of infrastructure in post-war Lebanon and the maturation of basic ICT.

conflict and those left to deal with it in the diasporic peripheries. As Dali in Shatila recalls:

> When the Intifada started I wanted to be in touch with my people so I entered the Palestinian room in mIRC. I hadn't know anyone directly from Palestine before. I was happy each time I entered the internet and discussed with Palestinians. When I returned home I would tell my mother I had talked with Palestinians from inside Palestine.

Palestinian internet usage and infrastructure/accessibility was motivated by the political context and the internet revealed confrontations amongst Palestinians. Palestinians sometimes voiced their counter-narrative in different ways. The use of Intifada images from Palestine clearly affected Palestinians in Jordanian and Lebanese refugee camps.

The death of 10 year-old Mohamed al Dura captured by a French cameraman and transmitted over television worldwide became the prominent symbol of Palestine as victim of oppression. Associated Press photographed another child from Gaza, 12-year-old Faris Odeh (see Picture 19), as he stood in front of an Israeli tank attempting to halt it by throwing stones. Although he was killed afterwards, this picture symbolized Palestinian resistance and steadfastness. In the Lebanese refugee camps that I visited, both images were found as murals on buildings and narrow alleys, or as posters and stickers in homes and offices. Some kindergartens, scout groups, and streets were named after them, turning these kids into icons of Palestinian uprising. Even though very bloody and disturbing, the picture of a nine-month-old baby with a bullet hole in her stomach (Iman Hijou from Gaza) was also circulating on the internet and even printed as a postcard. This picture seemed to capture the brutality of the Israeli state and army. All these images were distributed on the net and represented solidarity with Palestine. As the saying goes, 'a picture is worth a thousand words'; images reinforce textual content about the Intifada. This is especially successful when combining such visual/virtual rhetoric with familiar (tolerable) sayings. The slogan "Give me Liberty or give me Death!" with a waving Palestinian flag flanking the page on *Free Palestine* resembles the "I Die Therefore I Exist" cartoon also circulating on other websites (see Picture 26).[110]

But despite these *visual rhetoric* examples, the overall frequency of internet communication vis-à-vis the intifada showed many up and downs between my starting point in 2001 and the end of my fieldwork research in 2005. I often heard: 'Life goes on', despite the social devastation caused by occupation and war. Those that have to earn a living to feed their families have to hold on to some sort of survival and sanity. A sense of frustration can sometimes lead to 'numbness'. Perhaps these coping strategies will mean a decline in political internet activities and a rise in escapism. Many young people I met were still motivated to direct their efforts online along with an anxious search for direct physical contact. Samar from Shatila:

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[110] The first slogan is from a speech by Patrick Henry in 1775 on the American War of Independence; the second is a reference to Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum"--"I think therefore I am."

> The Intifada changed me a lot. I wanted to know everything about Palestine, I kept track of how many fighters died and people were killed. When I saw a child on TV that was killed, I would shout. Now when I see this, , it seems normal. Something inside of us snapped, is destroyed. I want to fight and do something. But since I'm outside what can I do? I started to enter the internet and speak to guys and girls in Palestine. When I meet Palestinians from Palestine I want to hug and kiss them, something inside me starts to grow, 'he is from inside, she has the smell of Palestine'.

Karma's experience when she visited Lebanon after having lived and worked in Ramallah, confirms what Samar tries to express:

> I can understand what it means for Palestinians outside to be in touch with Palestine, and how sacred it is to get direct information from inside. It's almost holy… when I returned to Lebanon and people knew I had been in Palestine they got all excited and emotional, and wanted to hug me. Ramallah 2002

Identifying as a Palestinian is an important political act in itself, especially when this identity is mocked or even contested.

A first online introduction and identification to the outside world is through a personal nickname or email address. Dali's long chat nickname in this chapter's introduction is a telling example. Others include: al-*thawra hatta al-nasr* (Revolution until victory), *Happy Birthday Intifada*, or emails addresses like *Palestine4ever@hotmail.com* and *hatem115@hotmail.com*.[111] Maryam from Shatila also took pride in being identified as a Palestinian, although this sense of pride was not always considered beneficial: "Some Palestinians, especially girls, use to say on the internet 'I am Lebanese', especially because they think Arab men like it. But after the Intifada everybody said 'I am a Palestinian' or 'I am from Shatila Camp". The politicised identification coincided with the broader internet attitudes/outlets in relation to Palestine. Of course, to explicitly present oneself as belonging to a particular community/political tendency draws immediate attention. Examples of internet identifications I found verify this.

Palestinian and political websites were among the favourite internet sources mentioned to me by Palestinian internet users in Lebanon. There were interesting parallels between the separate fieldwork settings; the examples and motivations in Lebanon did not differ much from the Palestinians I interviewed in the Jordanian refugee camps or in Palestine. Hiba from Bourj al-Baranje camp in Beirut was able to recall most internet sources to me. This 16-year-old teenager wanted to go beyond mere virtual participation to do something for Palestine:

> I visited all the sites, PFLP, Fatah, Hamas, Intifada.com… my friends forwarded these or mentioned them. Once I entered the Azzedine al Qassam [military wing of Hamas] website in Palestine. I felt like doing

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[111] Other interesting Arabic nicknames I encountered are: Wail Lil- 'alam itha imtalaka al- Falastini qararahu bi yadihi [Beware world, if the Palestinian will take decision in hos own hands]; Al-Musamaha fi Al-Wataniyya I'damun la ha [Tolerance for nationalism, is its execution]; Lianna Al-Quds lana 'unwan A'lantu Al-harb 'ala Al-Tughian [Because Al-Quds/Jerusalem is our address, I have declared the war on despotism]; Ma btuchmud nari wala btib jrahi ila biruj'ek ya falastin; My fire wont be extinguished and my wounds wont heal until you are back Palestine].

> more and wanted to become a member of this party through the internet.
> But I didn't do much with it because I had exams and no time to spend on
> surfing.

Maktoob, a pan-Arab site on which each Arab country has its own page, is an example of the internet-based politization.[112] Pro-Palestinianess was definitely at the heart of Maktoob's activities at the time. This would happen through debates and exchanges in the Palestinian room of the website, but the Intifada also became one of the main topics in the forums of other countries on Maktoob. The website's statistics show that the Second Intifada in September caused an upshot in its membership. It is also interesting to see that the commercial motivations of such internet projects did not need to obstruct social or political drives.

At the time, this major cyber space host even called its members, spanning the entire Arab world, to explicitly express solidarity with Palestine. *Maktoob* initiated more solidarity by responding to the anti-Israeli sentiment amongst its Arab members. Sameeh Toqan, Palestinian Jordanian and one of the initiators of *Maktoob*, said, "We will use *Maktoob* to its maximum capacity to express our support and dedication to our brothers and sisters in Palestine". During the high-points of the Intifada (2002) the website's opening page was temporarily redesigned to express support for the Palestinian people, and they set up an online fund for Palestinians urging its members to donate money for the Palestinian Red Crescent. Accordingly, the Intifada sparked the sympathy of many people inside and outside the Occupied Territories. Professor and activist Ibrahim Aloush in Jordan, explained how it awakened a general sense of rebellion in Arab streets: "Whether in terms of peace with Israel or in succumbing to dictates of the WB and IMF in our countries: the Intifada got back the vitality it missed for 25 years".

Yet, the Intifada became a 'normal' occurrence in Palestine. Violence and suffering were daily phenomena that affected many Palestinians for the rest of their lives. During interviews with web designers, internet project coordinators, and internet café employees in the West Bank and Gaza, discussions about the siege and reoccupation of the cities were some of the most intense moments I experienced during fieldwork. The interviewed were obviously very much affected by experiences that had only happened recently, or as we spoke. While creating a political boost to internet use, the occupation and invasion caused immense destruction. Many organizations and public places were indiscriminately destroyed during the sieges, whether commercial businesses or sites of political activity, everybody paid a price.

Stories I collected after visits to some of the organizations that dealt with this violent state of affairs gave direct insight on the impact of on-the-ground and direct confrontation. In fact, several fieldwork contacts believed their work also made them specific targets. Ma'an Bseiso of Palnet (ISP) explained that different conclusions arise from the military incursions:

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[112] It started as a website in 2000 and grew to become a complete portal in 2003. It is important to note that Maktoob is not referred to as a Palestinian, but an Arab, website.

At 2.30 a.m. the IDF invaded our building. Soldiers searched the whole building, blew up doors, threatened and abused our employees, eventually entered the room of the main power source, and completely shut down the connection. All Palnet internet lines were cut for at least 24 hours in Ramallah. I wondered why only our company in the building was attacked. If it was not deliberate, why? I think they came for us, they wanted to turn us off. They don't like what we're doing on the Net.

During the most severe attacks, while the media and press could not report because the IDF declared the Occupied Territories 'closed military zones', or because of reasons Bseiso referred to, on-the-ground witness reports were indispensable. The widely read *Palestine Monitor* website was a thriving source of information for the outside world and one of the most popular websites about and from Palestine in 2001-2004.[113] But even this non-violent, Western funded NGO was a casualty in the 'war on terror'. Patricia, coordinator of PM at the time, recalled the distressful experiences that took place six months prior to our meeting. The breathless reminiscences betrayed how shocking the siege was:

The soldiers used our office as their outlook post and stayed here for three weeks. They destroyed absolutely everything, including the hardware. It was so bad when we discovered they stole our computer equipment. We were expecting something to happen though. The day before the invasion we heard rumours. Israeli officials warned British and American foreigners to leave the city. We made backups in a hurry and before the borders were closed we sent our website coordinator to Jerusalem, from where she continued to work as much as possible.

It wasn't a coincidence. They knew PM was part of HDIP and working very effectively. We know they monitor everything we send out on the internet, even though we don't threaten Israeli security. The goal of Sharon and his government is to destroy every aspect of Palestinian democratic development. They have destroyed the PA technically by bombing the entire infrastructure, and politically by undermining Arafat's position. There is no official authority left so civil society, which is also critical to the PA, became a very important threat for Israel.

The experiences Patricia described were documented on the website, including pictures and personal testimonies. According to Joki, webmaster at the time in 2002, the events also forced the staff to be better prepared:

We started taking away our things after earlier sieges. Whenever we hear rumours of a possible invasion or attack, we remove as many documents and files as possible and take them home in boxes. But as an NGO we are not rich, we can't afford laptops and take home all our work. Yet, we managed to do a lot of work during the sieges and curfews. After the sieges we suffered a lot too, the soldiers really went out of their way. Some colleagues broke down and cried when we returned to our offices. I felt

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[113] Palestine Monitor is a joint website project of Palestinian NGOs united in HDIP, see also Chapter Three and Five.

raped.

'Big' websites like *Palestine Monitor* were not the only ones targeted. *Al Carma* Cyber Café and website, not a political website at all but mainly offering music, discussions, and contributions from the local community, had a similar experience at the time in Ramallah. Hisham recalls:

> Around the same time that the IDF invaded Ramallah in March 2002 and occupied Al Carma, the site was hacked and replaced with Israeli propaganda. Unfortunately we had kept the website's back-ups in the IC, which was destroyed completely. So the website and our portal project are completely irreparable.

Upon walking through and leaving the buildings where I conducted these interviews, I saw the evidence and traces of the attacks that had just been described. The demolitions by the military seemed an attempt to destroy the existence of intellectual and civil life in Palestine. These impacts introduced me to the cruel face of war and occupation. At the same time it helped me better understand how the situation stimulated an active online counter-response that would lead to a (re)construction of the imagined Palestinian nation. Internet became more like the 'classic' mediums of print capitalism and popular history/novels through which the national community is imaged. The online Palestine helped to transform the imagined nation.

4.3 Transforming the Nation

> The Palestinians I meet online tell me it is a nice and beautiful place when I say I am from Akka. I keep a diary book about Palestine and Akka and I found many things for it on the internet. Sometimes I ask my friends to help me so they send me emails with pictures of my country.
>
> –   Samah, Bourj al-Barajne camp, Lebanon.

The above-illustrated synergy between technological developments, state politics, and transnational identity, led to the growth of an online public sphere. The virtual dimension widened the scope of participation beyond territorial boundaries and deepened it across sections of society. Forums and chat rooms became meeting points for the gathering diaspora. Through virtual interactions, an online Palestinian community started a process of (re)constructing a collective identity, using the internet as a tool to 'collect' and 'transport' national identity. The experience and expectation of what it means to be a Palestinian or refugee, is constantly represented.

Diasporic elements and *sha'bi* (popular) Palestinian relics entered the online public spheres. Palestinians hooked up with other Palestinians to express, share, debate, listen, view, negotiate, or reject feelings and analyses. Online topics did not relate only to Palestinian politics and identity, but also included romantic experiences, cultural enquiries, business deals, and other aspects of life. Internet mediums offered new spaces to make/share music, stories, culinary recipes, fashion, and images. They form the ingredients of transnational identities and make tangible what is meant by

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'online Palestine'. Transnational (online) communication here doesn't erode, but re-confirms the meanings of a Palestinian state.

Samah is a refugee in Lebanon and, like many other Palestinians, she managed to partly compensate isolation with virtual mobility. The upshot for those who directly and indirectly managed to join the virtual space is that locally-based identity became part of a transnational Palestine.[114] This resulted in what I understand to be an online public sphere, and moreover inspired the commoditization of Palestinian identity on the internet.

Online Public Sphere

One stimulant of virtual networks was a program on Palestinian television called "Online". Keen to motivate Palestinian internet use in an uncomplicated way, it showed all sorts of internet possibilities. Concrete examples were used by the presenter while he explained how to surf websites or to use search engines such as Google. These examples were clearly framed in a national context. For instance, the presenter showed an example of a children's website depicting drawings of Mohamed al Dura. Historical websites were also represented. Participants in the studio and viewers at home were shown old and new photos of Jerusalem and Jaffa via a discussion of the *Palestine Remembered* website and *Google* 'image' search. I did not watch this program in Palestine, but during fieldwork in Lebanon, confirming the importance of other ICTs such as satellite television.[115] This type of trans-local access is something that was unattainable before satellite and internet mediums were available. Audiences of such programs now reach beyond the Occupied Territories where the TV broadcast is based. Even though the Palestinian Broadcast Centre (PBC) is not as professional or popular as *Al Jazeera* or *Al Manar,* many Palestinians in Lebanon watched it, knowing they could see President Arafat or be updated about local Palestinian news and debates.

Research in Jordanian and Lebanese refugee camps offered me a chance to accompany people to their homes and internet cafes. When pictures of Palestinian or pre-1948 images were found and viewed (together) through *Palestine Remembered*, the reaction was often full of excitement. Akram, one of the first owners of an internet café in Bourj al-Barajne, told of the first moments people started surfing Palestinian websites in his internet cafe: "Once a guy whistled and said in a voice of surprise 'Wooooow this is very nice'. I looked and saw it was just mountains, some sand, and 3 houses, probably just like any picture from a village in Tunis." Akram continued recalling those very first moments:

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[114] While referring to Palestinians as transnational in the sense of diaspora community, it is actually a trans-nation-state community that is implied.

[115] Many Palestinians in the refugee camps have a satellite dish. When it comes to reaching and influencing a mass audience, the internet is no match for television because satellite television can count on a much wider accessibility, and probably a higher impact of image and sound. But it is not the aim here, nor is it possible, to make comparisons with regards to the potential effects of (cultural) power over transnational communities.

> When they just started chatting directly with Palestine you could hear them shouting in the IC, "he is from Palestine! Look I'm talking with Palestine! Later, after they finished, they proudly told people they met that they "talked with Palestine".

Some internet users in Lebanon responded in surprise when they discovered that the other Palestinian person online lives a comfortable life in Palestine, or worse, is actually uninterested in the political situation in general. When they chat with a Palestinian from Gaza (one of the most deprived, isolated, and destructed places in Palestine) who doesn't care much about the Intifada, the shock on the Lebanese side of the internet line is evident. One of the interviewed in Bourj al-Barajna camp chatted with a Gazan who defends the soft peace process without concern for the Right of Return. I noticed how little cracks started to emerge in the idealized imagined nation. But some Palestinians do not necessarily view these 'cracks' as negative. According to Ali Khalidi sometimes the romanticized visions about the Palestinian identity need to be challenged:[116]

> All kinds of new confrontations create new paradoxes. But sometimes we need to correct the history of, for example, the struggle for self-determination. The liberation movement was far too nationalistic and submerged internal or local differences. If you look at the PLO narratives, you will find so many nationalist myths. We must sometimes admit mistakes, take responsibility, and continue. Repeatedly lifting up morale isn't always necessary nor the best strategy. Sometimes it's good to bring some of the fantasies down to reality.

National discourses by (and about) Palestinians in the camps and internet cafes clearly centred on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Though Internet possibilities 'compensate' for the absence of the territorial, they do not replace it. Several outcomes arise from this situation: the specific history and realities of the Palestinian refugees have practical implications on representations of national identity and it impacts the way internet functions as a tool to escape isolation, especially in the refugee camps. Khuloud, mother of two teenagers from Bourj al-Barajne camp in Beirut (and one of the few 'older' users), talked about the internet as an important outlet she had to have 'at least once a week':

> The first time was amazing; when I received my first email I even shouted in the internet café (…). Especially when I got one from my uncle in America whom I love so much... We need this more than others. Palestinians in Jordan are closer to the land and some can even go to Palestine, but for us this is impossible.

Many Online discussion forums had topics related to the Middle East; Palestinians debated whether Israeli state-terrorism could be compared with

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[116] Palestinian sociologist, interviewed at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon 2004.

Palestinian terrorism. On *Indymedia Palestine* Palestinian supporters debated fiercely about what can and cannot be accepted regarding resistance and suicide bombers. It is hardly effective to refer to 'the' Palestinian use of 'the' internet as it is difficult to unravel *who* exactly uses *what* kind of internet and *why*. Social and economic conditions impact the level/form of internet participation. More and more websites, like that of Hezbollah or the *Palestine Media Centre,* concerned with domestic political affairs or promoting resistance to Israel were entirely Arabic or seemed to address Arab or Muslim audiences in particular.

    But many new initiatives also helped increase grass-roots participation because they pulled wider sections of society onto the internet. Especially multi-media websites (with access to radio channels, television stations, and [banned] newspapers) that managed to strengthen online interactivity. The impact may reach beyond the internet café: human rights appeals, political communiqués, and popular images can be printed from the net, and then reproduced or circulated in universities, mosques, or cafés – even in one's own living room, as I noticed during visits to friends and contacts, reviving interest in the Palestinian heritage even more.

    The internet isn't only a network that puts Palestinians in contact with other Palestinians or communities, it also reconnects them to their history. Palestinians I spoke with in Lebanon and Jordan often pointed to the fragility and decrease of the collective national heritage. While the Palestinian diaspora enters its fourth generation, construction of national Palestinian identity relies on an even weaker internalization of political and cultural roots, especially as those who actually remember Palestine before they left during the Nakba become extinct.

    The process of transforming the idealized nation is not without problems and will also mean different kinds of internal confrontations. When discussing Palestinian identity and how the situation affected national consciousness the content depended on whether I sat with someone in 'Abdoun or Wihdaad refugee camp in Amman, and in al-Hamra or Bourj Barajne in Beirut.[117] Ibrahim Aloush in Amman therefore urged me to not overlook internal difference among Palestinians in Jordan:

> Certain sections of the Palestinian population have assimilated into the system and developed interests not very dissimilar to those of the Jordanian regime. They promote economic normalization by facilitating connections between Arab and Zionist businessmen, or cultural normalization when these intellectual liberals try to foist on people's minds the idea that Arabs and Zionists should be friends, brothers, cousins, and all that crap. There is not one kind of Palestinian; you find a spectrum of views.

It didn't take long to discover internal differences. In some refugee camps, people dealt with the Intifada as if it was literally theirs, especially in Jordan since many Palestinians still have close contact with relatives in the Occupied Territories, of

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[117] Abdoun is a posh area in Amman, Wihdaad a refugee camp in Amman's outskirts. Al Hamra is the famous central street of Beirut near the prestigious American University of Beirut, while Mreizhe the working class and sha'bi area of South Beirut.

which some were killed, imprisoned, tortured, or injured. Most Palestinians I interviewed felt connected to the Palestinian cause at least in a spiritual way, and sometimes in a mix of national/commercial/spiritual motives.

"Made in Palestine": Palestinian identity as commodity

With the Intifada, the national Palestinian identity revived and a hope for the Right of Return for the nearly three million Palestinian refugees returned to the political agenda. In this context, the internet was eagerly used as a way to recollect, negotiate, and transfer part of the Palestinian heritage in reference to Palestine's geographic territory, narratives, traditional culture, and the Nakba. Pre-1948 pictures, those of the '48/'67 exodus, and pictures of the new Intifada, were the most popular images downloaded and forwarded on the internet. The first two sources articulate a certain nostalgia and loss, while the latter express resistance and hope.

The Palestinian *Kufiya* (the national black-red-white-green shawl) was already a political symbol (Swedenburg 1992) but Palestinian solidarity movements lifted it to the point that it has become a standard activist accessory. The protest movements that revived all over the world after the Seattle protests in 1999, and post 9-11 anti-war protests, made Palestinian symbols like the *Kufiya* part of a new activist urban trend along with other political gadgets. The emphasis on Palestinian national symbolism became more globalized through the internet. The (usually better-off) Palestinian diaspora (and sympathizers) can even purchase Palestinian goods that are usually not available in their country. The 'commoditization' of Palestinian internet took place thanks to Palestinian ICT entrepreneurs who engaged themselves in E-commerce projects that involved local Palestinian products like Palestinian olive oil, Dead Sea products, Nablus soap, flags, posters, and shirts (see Picture 21).

Palnet was the first such Palestinian online store to offer 'typical' locally produced Palestinian products. Ma'an Bseiso, manager of the project at the time, said that many internet users showed great interest in Palestinian history and culture, "but especially those who have difficulty to access and express themselves in mainstream spaces in the homeland or in the host land". *Maktoob* facilitated E-commerce by offering *Cash U* cards; these prepaid cards were used like internet credit cards and were made to stimulate online shopping. Thus, that which constituted the Palestinian public sphere changed along with the development and connection of culture with technology.

It is interesting that a *transnational* diaspora gets to be reconfigured through the *local*. The *Palestine Costume Archive,* from producer Jenni Allenby in Australia, is an example of how locality, culture, identity, and the internet become (politically) intertwined. As Allenby said during an interview: "We are the only place in the word that Palestinian women can email, prior to their wedding for example, to ask how to acquire a traditional dress, or what type of costume was worn prior to 1948." This is evidently important in the context of the presently evolving narrative disseminated *about* rather than *by* Palestinians. It exemplifies what Anderson means by stating: "This

emerging public sphere is not only one of talking back to power but also one of a wider range of public actors who talk to each other sometimes about power, and often about the power of the new media in their communication" (2001:3).

The internet is 'superior' to other forms of mediation in different ways. ICT provides a medium in which direct participation is allowed and functions as a key communication tool. Furthermore, the easy, graphic, mouse-controlled interface on the World Wide Web has clearly popularized the internet even more (Terranova 2004: 41). In other words, internet technology expanded the public sphere by increasing participation *and* connecting diverse publics. It creates spaces for new interpretations and new interpreters, making a virtual/internet mediated Palestinian nation part of the 'imagined' Palestinian community.

Interwoven in the texts and images that are produced and disseminated in cyber space were the re-articulated narratives about Palestinian culture, history, and national identity. Internet offered the political and commercial modes a space to practice these communicative exchanges. Rather than viewing this development as a top-down and static phenomenon, I will highlight its bottom-up dynamic. In Chapter Three I traced the early development of (professional) Palestinian internet manifestations; in the following section I will discuss how grass-roots internet initiatives that I came to know through local contacts and interviews developed even more.

4.4 Palestine Online and Offline

> The 'Palestinian body' was somehow divided. People in Palestine used to think that the Palestinians outside are cowards, that they gave up, abandoned them and the land. Not everybody knows about the massacres that took place against the '48 Palestinians. The idea seemed that we, outside, are detached from the Palestinian 'body'. As if we had assimilated or melted into the societies where we took refuge—the Lebanese, the Jordanian, Syrian, etc. That they inside are fighting, while we here are simply doing nothing, while in fact we were suffering a lot. The internet is correcting such notions, and showed that we—by our thoughts, struggle, money and everything we have, are devoted to the Palestinian cause, which is their cause as well. The internet was the tool to gather the Palestinian 'body' that had been scattered …this way we are creating a new society". – Mohammed, Nahr al-Bared camp, Lebanon.

Palestinians in Lebanon operate actively as internet consumers and producers. During trips and time I spent in refugee camps, I met many talented refugees who I regard as the first grassroots Palestinian internet producers. Shaker from Beirut played a role through his writings on the *Electronic Intifada* website and his personal emails about life in Lebanon, while Mohamed Qasqous from Nahr al-Bared set-up Albareek.com with a few friends. Not only does the internet help people in Palestine to be heard and noticed, it is used to reconnect the divided 'Palestinian body', as Mohammed Qasqous

points out. But *how* do the birth of Palestinian cyber space and the success of local initiatives help reconnect the divided 'Palestinian body'? As a 24-year-old student from Nahr al-Bared refugee camp, Mohammed actively contributed to this virtual interaction/reconnection. Like others I met who made their own websites, Mohammed spent day and night on Al Bareeq. He involved friends from Nahr al-Bared to help out and he also helped others when they need his expertise.

One of the local websites Mohammed helped set up was Nahrelbared.org, the official website of the camp that was set up as part of the Across Borders Project. This project, 'Raghm al-Hudoud' in Arabic, epitomized the potential internet revolution at the time. Thanks to professional projects like the Across Borders Project (ABP), Palestinians could cross the borders between the countries and refugee camps dividing them. The Information Technology Unit at Birzeit University launched the ABP in 1999, providing the Palestinian community access to a worldwide audience. The internet projects motivated the refugee community towards Palestinian reunification by linking several refugee camps scattered in the region.

The first ABP centre to open was launched at Ibdaa Cultural Centre in Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem in July 1999. It gave Dheisheh the first internet café in a Palestinian refugee camp. Compared to initial incidental and personal internet experiments, this project was clearly community-based. Expanded from the first website project of Muna Hamzeh, it offered online generally unavailable newspapers and sources to refugees in the camps or the Occupied Territories (Hamzeh 2001).[118] In September 2000, ABP management was handed over to the Centre of Continuing Education (CCE) at Birzeit University in order to professionalize the project.

Crossing Borders

> We have a subject on the site called 'an elder and his village' where we interview an old person who tells about how Palestine was before and after the Nakba. This is especially important because these people were eyewitnesses in 1948.
>
> – Nahr al-Bared, ABP Website coordinator, Lebanon

The Birzeit team scheduled the opening of additional ABP centres in refugee camps: four in Palestine (2 in the West Bank and 2 in the Gaza Strip), two in Lebanon, and one in Jordan. The aim of the ABP was to have a self-supporting system; users paid a small fee for the internet and the courses. As the Intifada broke out, ABP programs were put on hold, just as everything else in Palestinian society was paralyzed. Yet the ABP managed to announce the opening of its first computer and internet centre in Lebanon. The Bourj al-Shamali refugee camp near Tyre in the South of Lebanon

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[118] She was also the first to put entries of her personal journal online in which she reflected on how events were lived on the ground during the first weeks of the Intifada.

hosted the third official ABP centre and the first of such initiatives outside of Palestine. The opening of the Lebanese centre was a significant achievement since it marked the first regional online network of Palestinian refugee camps that truly crossed borders. When recalling the official Lebanese launching in Bourj al-Shamali camp, the coordinators' enthusiasm reflected the centre's potential social impact. In 2000, via a video screen and internet link-up, the ABP offered refugees in Bourj Shamali live connection with a refugee camp in Palestine as part of the opening celebration.

The stories I later heard in Lebanon during fieldwork in 2003 resembled those I had heard before in Ramallah about the opening celebration in Palestine. When I interviewed ABP coordinator Lubna Hammad in Palestine in 2001, she described the launching of the project in Jalazone refugee camp (West Bank) as an incredible event. During the opening, the camp was connected to refugees in Lebanon. Some refugees managed to connect with relatives for the first time through the internet line-up. The people that were present repeatedly enquired about missing family, cried, and requested the camera to move around in order to show the rest of the village or camp. Thus after hearing the stories in Bourj al-Shamali for a while, I discovered they were talking about the same virtual meeting that Lubna had described to me with regards to the opening of the Jalazone centre in Palestine: I was now meeting the people on the other side of the border.

The first initiators of ABP in Palestine were young and active IT professionals or students at Birzeit University. They knew the meaning of contact with international organizations and activists. They were also in touch with Palestinians in the 'periphery' that were cut-off from the 'centre': with refugees in camps and the exiled. Alaa' from Ramallah, one of the first participants, recalls:

> The diaspora in the West had the ability to access the internet. But not only politically engaged Palestinians were contacting people like me in Palestine, also those in refugee camps. We felt it had to come down to the people themselves, the most affected people being refugees. Families are torn apart and many have never met their families again because of the closed borders and occupation.

At the opening in 1999, one of the initiators recited a poem by Kamal Nasir about the importance of keeping the memory of Palestinian history alive, linking it to ABP as a way of recording and telling the history of Palestinian dispossession since 1948 through Palestinian eyes.

ABP worked in two phases; the first was 'the initiation' of the project. The central management at CCE offered refugees training in web design and financial management and provided computer labs, servers, and internet lines. The camp elected a board to represent the ABP and nominate the hosting organization. The second phase concerned 'the sustainability' of the project. A special website was set-up for each refugee camp and offered additional possibilities such as discussion forums in Arabic. During an interview in Palestine 2001, Lubna explained the idea:

> An important motivation for founding this website is to let refugees

themselves talk; to allow them to deal with their own issues. The second reason is to survive and communicate despite the many checkpoints and controls in the West Bank and the physical obstacles between Palestine inside and outside, and between the different refugee camps.

ABP thus describes its main challenge as bringing people together and promoting issues regarding Palestinian refugees. Next to its local and internal (diasporic) orientation, the project used the online platform to create a Palestinian voice to reach the outside world. The ABP coordinator, Nur, stated in 2005:

> The focus or goal here is ultimately to show an alternative image or the other side of Palestine and Palestinians. This is, for instance, why the section on poetry was included. The aim was to show that Palestinian refugees are not just poor people who have nothing to offer, but are just like the rest of us. They also write poetry for instance. It shows an element of the people in a personal way.

The main ABP website has a well-designed and user-friendly appearance. It gives a brief description on the front page with visible links to the various refugee camp websites that are linked to the project. It offers three main types: life stories, photo essays, and selected interviews. The left side of the page offers Arabic and English links to information about agreements, UN resolutions, interactive maps locating the refugee camps in Palestine, and significantly, video files in Real Media. Thus even though the ABP website is largely directed towards Palestinian refugees in camps, there is an attention to the inclusion of an international audience as well as a transnational Palestinian community by providing video and sound access to different refugee settings in the Middle East. It is an initiative with clear grass-roots objectives directed at refugee camps. The language of the discussion board option on the website is an indicator. Nur:

> The language of communication is mainly Arabic. This is why the forums are in Arabic, while the homepage is bilingual; English and Arabic. The Arabic-speaking people are the priority at this time. Another reason for not having an English discussion board is the capacity and resources that this would require.

Together with the local communities, ABP also developed camp-focused websites. By participating in the creation of the site the refugees opened a window into the history, society, and culture of Palestinians, and a refugee's everyday life in particular. The Nahr al-Bared camp had success with their website and showed a capacity to ascertain the participation of the local community. The website had its own coordinating team that continued to develop the website with local news, features, personal contributions, etc.

But the project faced many difficulties after it started in 1999 because of the outbreak of the Intifada; in fact, between 2000 and 2002 the staff faced serious technical and financial problems. Amidst the reoccupation of the Occupied

Territories, the focus shifted from development to sustainability of the project. After 2004 ABP teams and volunteers succeeded in refocusing the projects' aims towards political struggle for refugee rights and inter/intra communication between Palestinians in the diaspora. Setbacks to the general project were unavoidable. The military occupation and lack of finance dominated the ABP problems in Palestine. Since the start of the Intifada much of the infrastructure, like computer centres and software equipment, was wrecked. Before the Intifada it was at least possible for staff and volunteers to travel inside the Occupied Territories; fieldworkers went to the camps to organize training of local staff. Bassem, one of the field coordinators I met in Ramallah in 2002, related that while the need for the project increased with the Intifada, they were forced to downgrade it considerably:

> Now it's not even possible to go from Ramallah to Birzeit, so we can't give training and special courses in many camps either. The deterioration did not cause donors to understand the situation and be more flexible. In general, their priority changed from structural and sustainable projects [like ABP] to 'bread and milk' projects.

Meanwhile, the organizers continued to receive requests from other camps to join the ABP project. Some offered to cover their own costs, as long as the CCE was prepared to give guidance, training, administration, and allow them to work under its umbrella. Instead of developing the project, the ABP strategy became one of upgrading existing camps and saving the remains of the project in light of financial problems. According to Ivan, general coordinator of ABP in 2002:

> We don't have field officers, camp organizers, or district coordinators anymore. Only two employees are available for the whole project, the webmaster and me, because all the ABP money is gone. There is not even a possibility to pay the salaries of the current camp coordinators who depend on us.[119]

Many more problems occurred with the siege and reoccupation of the West Bank and Gaza; the imposed curfews made it difficult to carry out even the simplest requirements. Ivan continued:

> Due to closure and curfews we couldn't pay the website provider on time. The cheque probably never even arrived; a lot of post that comes in and out of Palestine is lost. The web-host provider then sold our url name so we had to change every hyper link from acrossborders.org to acrossborder.org.

The most serious consequence, however, was the fact that two new ABP camp centres in the West Bank and Gaza, could not start. Noor Shams camp in the North West Bank and Nussairat in the middle of Gaza were provided with just five

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[119] The project recruits, trains, and then hires someone from the camp to coordinate the project. The person will receive 100% salary the first 6 months, then 70% for the next 3 months, and finally 30% for the last three months. The camp needs to complete the rest of the salary through incomes generated by the new camp internet centres. The monthly salary for an ABP coordinator in Gaza is $350.

computers instead of the usual ten and the necessary hardware. Other scheduled launches of international ABP camp centres became more and more difficult.

The Lebanese ABP suffered many financial and technical problems due to the Intifada and closures in Palestine. Simply put: the international process of the project didn't continue as planned, even after ABP decentralized and was taken over by NGO's in Lebanon. Important meetings that were planned in Jordan to discuss the future of ABP-international had to be cancelled because the Palestinian representatives of acrossborders.org were not allowed to cross real borders. Ivan:

> In April we had an international conference planned in Amman with all ABP coordinators to finally discuss our international relations, the process in Lebanon, and our plan to extend our project to Jordan and Syria. But when the situation deteriorated in March and April and no travel permissions were given anymore, the meeting had to be cancelled.

With internet communication international meetings should have easily been held through internet conference. But the value of offline, face-to-face, communication in building projects, loyalty, and setting up bottom-up initiatives is important. The bottom-up experience was particularly important for internet development in Lebanese refugee camps.

Across Borders Lebanon

With all its difficulties, the Lebanese Across Borders Project eventually managed to launch ABP in two camps: Nahr al-Bared and Bourj al-Shamali. . The hosts of the project were Al Najde Women's Centre in Nahr al-Bared and Beit Atfal Sumoud (youth) Centre in Bourj al-Shamali, were initial participants of ABP. Young and educated people from the camp were recruited to coordinate and manage the project because they were rooted in the local social dynamics. Moreover, they understood the relevance of the internet very well because as a newly educated generation in the camps (at the time, in 2000) they were themselves experimenting with the possibilities of the internet.

Introducing the internet project to people in the camp required broad support and continuous promotion. Financial and social constraints made it even more necessary to prepare the community for the internet projects. Neither Nahr al-Bared nor Bourj Shamali were the 'easiest' places to start internet projects. One of the ABP coordinators in Nahr al-Bared, Ibrahim, explained how local disadvantages, together with troubles in Palestine, made work difficult:

> We use to set a date for the internet meeting but they [in Palestine] couldn't show up due to bombings that hit their centre (…) We also passed through difficult times due to problems with electricity and phone lines. This all resulted in weaker communication and we lost contact with many people. When the situation got better here, it worsened in Palestine.

Specific 'social' problems added to the difficult particularities in the local developments as well. Some, especially those who weren't familiar with or were suspicious of the internet, did not enthusiastically welcome it. The small and crowded internet cafes had a bad reputation; an internet centre inside an NGO had a better reputation than commercial internet cafes. As the ABP project operates under the umbrella of an established organization, they are generally better respected; girls were therefore often allowed to attend ABP. In both Lebanese ABP camp centres, girls also participated because the host organization employed young women to manage the project; women hanging around the internet centre and assisting made an important difference; this is why selection of the hosting NGO was an important issue in the camp.

Ties between the ABPs in Palestine and Lebanon broke but eventually the personal efforts and creativity of local coordinators saved parts of the project. Sami, a local ABP coordinator in Bourj Shamali camp, contacted people in Nour al-Shams (West Bank) through the internet. Through the email addresses that were still available, and subsequently the more regular MSN chats, virtual meetings between the refugee cams in both countries were revived and strengthened. From the beginning ABP was framed in a clearly politicized setting. The project started in Bourj al-Shamali camp on September 30, 2000, coincidently, one day after the Intifada broke out. The employees were committed to the project; Abu Wassim (director of host NGO Beit Atfal Sumoud) even considered it one of the organizations major projects at the time, but not the highest priority. ABP had internet competition because Al Karameh youth centre (Fatah related -the most powerful political faction of this camp), offered internet connection and two other small internet cafes also had internet clients. When I visited these places and compared it with the ABP centre, the age and gender demographic was clearly different.

I encountered interesting gender related situations when I attended the computer and internet trainings in Bourj Ashamali. The group consisted of men and women, from inside and outside the camp. Some female participants were veiled, others not and some men looked like they had just come from construction work with cement still sticking to their shoes. Yet others came dressed as '*muwazzaf*' (office employees). The atmosphere was very relaxed, so when students, and especially the teacher himself made a mistake, laughter and joking broke out. The coordinator mentioned that several Lebanese students also joined the course. According to Sami, coordinator of Bourj Shamali ABP: "During our training projects some Lebanese corrected their previous ideas about Palestinians and refugee camps because this is the first time they are intensively working *with* us." After the final course, students were offered work experience in an ICT company, computer shop, or even at an ABP project in the refugee camp.

Although the online reconnection with Palestine through the ABP launch strengthened the dream of al-*Awda* (Return) among a new refugee generation, not all refugees were automatically interested in ABP. The coordinators had to think of special ways to approach people. They used encouraging leaflets like: "Would you like

to talk with your relatives and friends abroad, or even in Palestine? Come to the Najde Centre and you will." The online meetings between Lebanon and Palestine eventually made a huge impact and formed new virtual communities. Sami described the method of the *virtual group meetings* as "a group of young Palestinians in one camp in Lebanon meets another group in a camp in Palestine." Sometimes even three groups met at the same time like the meeting between Nahr al-Bared (North Lebanon), Bour al-Shamali (South Lebanon), and Jalazone (West Bank Palestine). Participants were first introduced to know each other to 'break the ice' and then they discussed a certain topic that the coordinators of the different camps agreed upon. One of the topics discussed during my visits there was the role of the Geneva Agreement, and what refugees themselves thought of it or what they thought should be changed.[120]

After the official part of these virtual meetings, the youth were allowed to chat freely and exchange emails with their counterparts on the other side. The coordinator either went out to smoke a cigarette or sat somewhere with colleagues, but usually he or she had to run from one computer to the other to explain how to add someone to a chat-room, send attachments, or open received files. Sometimes the meetings were organized between girls only in order to allow them to discuss topics they wouldn't want to in a mixed group. Individual continuation with their online friends and the search for others after they finished these 'meetings' were considered part of the project's success. According to the users and staff I spoke with in Lebanon, participants clearly preferred to have contact with Palestinians inside Palestine.

In contrast to Bourj al-Shamali where Sami continued setting up the project, Nahr al-Bared had problems related to particular social issues. The support of religious authority Sheikh Ahmed Hadj for the project was to some extent crucial. After many negative rumours about internet cafes had already prevailed, people also started to complain about the ABP hosted Najde. Najde was operating a fully equipped internet centre by the time they had become a target of radicals and widespread gossip, some of which wanted to prohibit children and youth going there. The Sheikh decided to see for himself what the suspicions were all about. After his own assessments he publicly referred to Najde as a 'safe' and 'clean' place, and contributed to the acceptance of the ABP internet centre in the camp.

Participants of the virtual sessions, and those using the ABP internet centres, experienced new online opportunities in different ways. While hanging around the Najde Women's Centre in Nahr al-Bared, I saw 19-year-old high school student Rami working on the internet at ABP. He was not just chatting like most of the young people I noticed. He quickly surfed many websites through different search engines, copying and saving files and texts on his disc. In a way, he seemed to be creating his own archive. When I approached him and asked how he usually starts his internet voyage, and to explain what he was doing, he said:

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[120] 'Geneva' was one of the many failed negotiation attempts at the time, promoted by a section of the elite Palestinian representatives; this offer was moderated to the extent that the right of return was abandoned.

> I start at 4 p.m., so there is always someone online in some part of the world. Then I open Google. I usually have a specific subject I want to research, and start surfing and reading. Today it's about 'Smoking Hazards'. I found some websites and papers that I will copy. (…) The other time I wanted to know about the philosophical meaning of 'logic'. I had general questions - what is 'logic'? When I was with friends, I asked – 'do you know what logic is all about?' I then write the answers in my notebook, and continue to search for it online.

He clarified that reading everything online takes a long time and would be too expensive at the internet café. Instead of paying another 1.500 Lira (1 US $) per hour in the net café, he saves the documents on a floppy, and using his uncle's computer, goes through the material and selects what he wants to keep.

During fieldwork in Bourj al-Shamali I talked to a brother and sister in the ABP internet centre. They were chatting with their family abroad: he with Tulkarem (West Bank) on voice chat, she with her cousin in Libya, who had just sent her pictures of her engagement party through MSN. It is important to note that ABP opened a gateway between the camps and the transnational community, but not necessarily between the camps and Lebanese society in their own everyday environment.

Some of the Lebanese activists who were involved with the project regretted that ABP could not overcome the gap between Palestinians and Lebanese. When I met Bassem he said:

> Refugees in Lebanon are meant to stick to a dream instead of fighting for change and basic rights. The idea is they should not intervene in the society surrounding them. UNRWA is also representing a contradicting; on one hand helping them [Palestinian refugees] and on the other not changing their situation.

The camps are embedded in the local settings of host countries and this means that the ABP project in the camp is also affected by the reality of racism and lack of infrastructure. Since the problems do not match those in the Occupied Territories, the project must therefore acknowledge these differences explicitly if it wants to improve the position of refugees.[121] But as mentioned above, the ABP project struggled to develop in Lebanon and was confronted with (state) structured realities they could not control. And in addition, it was insufficiently funded. The launch of ABP in Lebanon differs from and reminds us of the challenges in Palestine, where the project originated.

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[121] Later the Digital Solidarity Project was set-up by some of the same activists that were involved with ABP. It was an internet project that evolved to a matured phase after ABP experiments and the technological possibilities improved, especially in terms of overcoming the infrastructural problems. At it can be seen that this project provides online content as well as offline projects for the refugees in the camps, like filmmaking and design. It goes without saying that ABP suffered enormously and the host organization's building was also destroyed.

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Across Borders Palestine

> It is a family visit flooded with love and prevention. From inside the one meter separation of both sides, you can hear a flow of names flying through the air, "my name is so and so.., I'm looking for such and such a person…do you know him?" […] Hands and bodies were penetrating the fence, the thorns of the wires were piercing its teeth inside their hands, chest, even faces, tearing their clothes, but they did not mind as long as they could have one touch from an outstretched hand. Letters, addresses, and dates were flying everywhere. Bottles of water were exchanged across the fence, but tears were the masters of the occasion. They couldn't cut the iron fence for sure, but they made it more flexible. They had been waiting all their lives to exchange such a long look, but how long will they wait to embrace each other? "Al-Safir.[122]

Following the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon, Palestinians on both sides of the border seized the historic opportunity to 'reunite' with other Palestinians from whom they had been separated for nearly 6 decades by a border fence. The pictures and stories of the border meetings reiterate the fact that Israel still denies the Right of Return to Palestinian refugees. The initially random meetings at the border became coordinated visits, organized by Palestinian organizations in both countries.[123] Children of Ibdaa' centre in Dheisheh camp took the opportunity to meet face-to-face with the children from Shatila camp (Beirut) they had known via the Across Borders Project.

Prior to the face-to-face reunions at the borders, the reunifications were already 'assisted' via internet by Across Borders. After it started in Dheishe, the ABP stretched over the rest of the Palestinian Territories and was to be available in the North (Nablus/Jenin), Centre (Ramallah/Bethlehem), and Southern parts of Palestine (Gaza). At the time of fieldwork in 2001/02 ABP officially finished setting up Khan Younes (Gaza), Jalazone (Ramallah/Birzeit) and Ama'ri (Ramallah) camp centres. They continued to be assisted with lease-lines, web-development, and trainings. According to the original plan, the camps had to finalize the initial phase in July 2002. As mentioned in the above Lebanese experiences, the Israeli military response to the Palestinian Intifada delayed the process a great deal and international funds were withdrawn. According to Raed Mustafa, responsible for ABP at the time in 2002, the practical consequences of the re-occupation of Palestinian territories were very damaging. For instance, the ABP website coordinator now had to get special permission from the Israeli army to go to Gaza. This immobility increased the problem that ABP Gaza was suffering anyway, and led the internet centre and website to a deplorable state.

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[122] Al-Safir daily newspaper, Beirut, May 31 2000.
[123] The Israeli army started to obstruct the Palestinian refugee reunions and eventually completely disallowed them with a shoot-to-kill policy. Between the withdrawal in 2000 and my longer visits in 2003, three Palestinian teenagers attempting to reach the border to see Palestine were killed by Israeli snipers. See Chapter Three for this case.

Jalazone refugee camp had the reputation of being a very active ABP camp. Trainings, courses, and services were offered and the host organization even managed to generate its own capital with which they could sustain the project. The project's local success relied to a large extent on grass-roots participation and leadership within the society. Jalazone was unlike the Ama'ri ABP. In Ama'ri the problem was not simply lack of efficient political coordination and good leadership, or a low level of local participation. The camp is located on the poor outskirts of Ramallah, right after Qalandia checkpoint, dividing the West Bank centre (Ramallah, Birzeit) from Jerusalem and the rest of Palestine. This makes the camp an attractive place for Palestinian demonstrations and thus vulnerable to Israeli army attacks. The military operations also hampered the refugees' internet participation, especially of women, as they depended on access inside the camp more often than men. This access was mainly provided in the Women's Centre - host to the ABP project in the camp. But when soldiers rolled into the camps with their tanks and jeeps their infrastructure was destroyed and access to the internet was prevented for many women and children in the camp; the destructions went beyond the level of infrastructure.[124]

Despite the problems that would occur during the sieges, ABP was hosted in the Ama'ri Women's Centre and opened its doors to all refugees in July 2001, in the middle of the Intifada. While the ABP internet centre in al-Amari was open for all, it aimed at women and girls in particular. The team offered special courses for women, many of whom worked as hairdressers, designers, or make-up stylists in the camp. During the courses they learned to find information online that they could use for their work. Therefore, offering separate courses and internet hours proved to be a success that increased the initial attendance and later normalized mixed participation. From 9 till 15.00 the centre was reserved for females, and from 15.00 till 22.00 for males. Many stories were circulating in the Palestinian camps about occurrences at 'Raghm al-Hudoud' (ABP): the family that was reconnected to relatives in Bourj al-Shamali in Lebanon, or the woman who met a man on the internet and eventually married him. Lubna Hamad, who coordinated ABP in 2001, told me about one special participant in Ama'ri:

> The story of Yasser al-Azaa is exemplary of the chance to develop local involvement. This 70 year old man types his stories and ideas about the camp and the Palestinian issue and has young people post it for him on the website.

And Lubna Hamad describes how ABP helped improve the position of some women,

> After the women finished the internet and computer courses offered through ABP some of them took a loan to purchase a computer and started doing administrative work at home. This way they managed to generate extra income without having to leave the children or elderly.

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[124] In one incident in June 2002 two children were killed and seven others injured in Ama'ri camp by explosive devices that the Israeli soldiers left behind. Some of the children I met in the ABP centre were talking about it and showed the pictures. The Ama'ri ABP website put this news as a popup on its homepage.

The youth in Ama'ri camp greatly enjoyed the availability of the internet; they used it for school assignments, to make new friends online, and to email. Some of the project organizers had mixed feelings, especially about the impact of porn sites on children or chats for young women to meet boys. According to a volunteer at the Women's Centre who eventually took the reservations of family members seriously, not all complaints were ungrounded:

> In the beginning there was a large group of users, it was very full in the internet centre. It was 'too enthusiastic' because we didn't realize that many teenagers were indeed surfing sex sites. We were notified by the technical staff of Birzeit University who could view the online activities, and adapted a security system that blocked these websites.

But regardless of general successes, Refa', the Women's centre coordinator, explained that after a while and after many Palestinians from the camp were killed:

> the centre just could not continue. This camp was attacked many times by the Israeli army, you must understand the impact. Tanks came all the way to the entrance of our centre and even damaged the telephone networks of the camp. We were disconnected for 23 days and had to stop the internet services for three months. The contract with CCE ended but we were not able to take over the whole responsibility and coordination of the project as was planned.

They still tried to continue and the ABP coordinator of al-Amari considers the awareness and use of internet particularly important for refugees:

> Especially for political reasons, refugees feel they must strengthen the relationships between the camps and face the fact that nobody else is concerned about their issues and rights.

Similar to the stories in Ama'ri and Jalazone, the launch of the ABP project in Khan Younes camp (in the very south of Gaza) also occurred with the (re)connection of family in Lebanon. ABP was the first internet project in Khan Younes. Iyad al-Jalous, ABP coordinator in the camp, recalled the launch as they hooked up with other camps in Lebanon and used web-cam to see each other. In the beginning there was some suspicion but eventually people got enthusiastic to join the project. Flyers and ads were used to announce courses and activities in the camp centre. To prepare society for this 'new' phenomenon, they also offered 'separate' activities and provided two internet rooms for boys and girls.

ABP had to work inside the local/social culture and be a progressive project at the same time. According to Iyad, "Women should not pay the price of the mistakes that guys usually make in these internet centres, but we cannot just neglect the culture and traditions either." The specific location, extreme entrapment, and isolation of Gaza, also means there is a stronger conservative socio-religious tendency compared to the West Bank. This explains the different attitudes towards gender participation in public life and internet use. There are many difficulties in this camp;

especially complicated is their separation from the rest of Gaza and West Bank. Iyad explained:

> They need to have connections with Palestinians outside, and especially Lebanon, because there is not enough information about their lives. We know they are sad and angry because they don't live inside Palestine and have no direct role in resisting Israeli occupation and oppression.

The Khan Younes website therefore offered news about the camp as a way to bridge the gap. Iyad motivated his participants by supplying them with a list of email addresses in Lebanon that they could contact. He continues; "We discovered that we are living in similar circumstances: first as Palestinian refugees in a camp and second with very bad economic and social conditions." The internet connections could overcome the isolation between Gaza and the West Bank, and allow them to communicate directly with Palestinians in the diaspora as well. Iyad:

> This is important because Gaza is like an Israeli prison. We are isolated and surrounded by army ships from the seaside, Israeli soldiers from the land, and the Air Force from the air. On top of this separation we are even internally separated because they divided the Gaza strip into three parts with checkpoints.

Two years after the first ABP centre had introduced the internet to the camp for the first time there were more than 22 internet cafes in Khan Younes. People continued to chat about their circumstances and were engaged in many activities online. Many did not escape the offline reality with which they were daily confronted, but projects like ABP, and later initiatives, did provide a gateway to disseminate their opinions and stories about these everyday realities.

4.5 Conclusion

Internet provided communication, and projects were clearly shaped by Palestinian national politics. In this Chapter I focused on the question of how everyday political life stirred Palestinian cyber space, what it consisted of, and how it advanced, and I explored events that contained the creation of transnational Palestinian linkages and imaginations. The outbreak of the Intifada was a significant political boost to mass internet use. The experiences of the 2002 invasions motivated organizations and individuals to instrumentalize the internet by making websites that reported and represented the incidents, using videoconference to continue to conduct business, and designing special software to store data and organize homework assignments and exams for students.

The Across Borders participants in Bourj Shamali and Nahr al-Bared, as well as the stories of ABP in Ramallah and Gaza, picture how Palestinian communities are influenced by the internet. Furthermore, the purposes and motivations for internet use are diverse. For Palestinians in the homeland, the Occupied Territories, the

internet provided an outlet and new way to communicate and express events; for Palestinians in Lebanon the internet provided a new medium for gaining knowledge about the homeland or to strengthen internal communication.

Some of the activists in Lebanon that were involved with these projects said they were missing an organic link with local political matters. For them, ABP gave an important platform for communication but not a body for political change. Nevertheless, the way the project evolved in its specific settings revealed differences between the camps. The Nahr Bared ABP became a good outlet for the community, the site became an archive of the camp, so through people's involvement in the website, the project had a more community-based characteristic. In Bour Shamali the ABP was becoming more directed at voicing protest and writing statements about the conditions in the camp; it was mostly focused on the outside world. I argued that the internet presents a significant alternative voice and provides a longed-for meeting point but that it does not replace the still strongly present focus on a non-virtual state and desire for face-to-face contact.

The internet profoundly changed the dynamics of internal and external embedded social relations. Chat, emailing, and websites all provide accessible instruments to the Palestinian community. Numerous websites and projects overcame, to some extent, the fragmented Palestinian diaspora. Internet users in refugee camps feel compelled to seek contact with their long-lost brothers and sisters, disseminate on-the-ground facts, and consume information from new global sources. An imagined national identity configured online is clearly framed in the desire to return to a homeland. I observed tactical and strategic internet uses motivated by the aim to correct political representation towards an international Western audience, as well as inside their own Palestinian communities. This re-construction of Palestinian (online) presence reveals how virtual community evolves in practice. Though often romanticized, Palestinian ideals were not always unified, confirming that these meetings and encounters are not always smooth, or to be taken for granted. Direct, online, transnational communication also asserted, contested, and altered the collective "national imagination" of Palestinians.

It is important to note that an available infrastructure for communication is a prerequisite to online (political) content. Internet access and usage provide the structure and motivation for the creation of a transnational virtual community. *Palestine Remembered*, *Maktoob*, *PalChat*, *Mirc*, MSN, emailing, and projects like Eye-to-Eye and ABP discussed in this chapter, are practical examples of how this *virtualization* is made operational. As the ABP offered Palestinian refugees a voice and opened a window into the world, it was a repository of virtual Palestinian interactivity. In due course it promoted the development of more Palestinian websites, blogs, and online outlets.

What struck me while doing the interviews and hanging around the ABP and internet cafés, was that some of the most popular websites were those about Palestinian martyrs, like Kataeb al-Aqsa' and al-Qassem. I aim to further analyse these virtual representations in their online and offline settings in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Virtual Palestine—Online Representations

5.1 Introduction

The internet consists of the electronic infrastructures that construct interaction and information systems (Castells, Amoore 2005:364). This global electronic space, or the 'space of flows', as Castells coined it, brings people of different diasporic 'locales' together, indicating a unique platform for dispersed communities. Websites have become one of the dominant elements of these electronic 'flows'; websites are the mediating 'spaces' through which the Palestinian nation has often been imagined and shaped. Many Palestinians separated by national borders, roadblocks, and other travel restrictions were able to exhibit new modes of connectivity via novel internet projects such as ABP. The alternative virtual space blends with the strong ideal of an independent Palestinian state. While most refugees have never seen their land of origin, virtual traversals to and from Palestinian cities and villages are made via the internet. Meanwhile, internet use motivated the emergence of hundreds of websites about (and in support of) Palestine. The outbreak of the Intifada in 2000 is the background by which to understand the rapid increase of (pro) Palestinian websites. Technological developments, the *Arabization* of website interfaces, and the Public Relation strategies of several high-quality Palestinian websites towards Western audiences, have marked their groundbreaking growth.

Palestinian websites can be interpreted in different ways. Birzeit University's *Complete Guide to Palestinian Websites* was the first comprehensive index. Besides mapping such online sources, I also asked Palestinians I met in internet cafes and during interviews about their favourite sites (which are not necessarily Palestinian) and added them to my list as well. As the list of websites continued to grow, I shifted from collecting and tracing, to categorizing them. Mapping and studying websites related to Palestine made me question several issues. *Firstly*, I wanted to determine which audiences were being targeted and why. To understand this, I distinguished between the *globalizing* and *localizing* inclinations of Palestinian websites.

The *globalizing* websites are those with a broad or international focus. Born during the Intifada, many of these websites' most important goals was to counter dominant views and media biases that contribute to the de-humanization of Palestinians. Linked to this important *re-humanization* attempt, the official *.ps* internet country-code and the growing number of Palestinian bloggers amounted to a direct representation of Palestine. Part of the expansion of websites related to Palestinian, these developments also require analysis.

During categorization it became clear that there were also websites that don't necessarily focus on the international (Western) community. These have a local perspective or are specifically related to Palestinian communities and narratives; they

are the *localizing* Palestinian websites. Earlier websites with a local reference already emerged around 1996 and mainly belonged to professional Palestinians in the media or IT sectors; as the technology became easier, more projects appeared and more people participated. These grass-roots websites can articulate a virtual locality in two ways: by outlining a personal objective (through a family website or later, a personal blog), or by being shaped by a particular geographic location (such as a city, village, or refugee camp). Websites like *Beit Rima* and *Remembering Jenin* from the West Bank or *Rafah Today* from Gaza, are clear examples of this type of localization.

The *second* question emerging from my research of Palestinian websites relates to their *mode of operation*. I was interested to know how websites were grounded, who are the people behind the websites, what motivated them, and how do they consider online projects to be part of the struggle in everyday Palestinian life? I reviewed several websites according to the personal experiences and everyday engagement of the people who make them. From this perspective it is possible to see the offline realities and experiences behind the scenes of online virtual representations. One of the outcomes of this two-fold investigation of websites was that I discovered a discrepancy between the offline popularity and discussions of certain websites, and the way they link/refer to each other.

This triggered a *third* set of questions. *Free* virtual internet spaces also represent systems of *exclusion*. Some of the websites that were popular among Palestinians I interviewed, such as those linked to Hamas or Hezbollah, were not referred to by the leading (globalizing) websites. This revealed an online political strategy connected with the targeting of audiences; some websites avoid association to other 'radical' ones. The last part of this chapter deals with assumptions about Muslim internet participation vis-à-vis (dominant) views about Islam, modernity, and technology related to the general perception of Islam and the 'war on terror' in the West (especially after 9/11).

5.2 Tracing Palestinian Websites

> Palestinians in specific should utilize a platform like the internet in order
> to have a more prominent presence on the net.
>
> – Haithem El Zabri, Director, Solidarity Design, 2003

In order to trace initial Palestinian online representation we need to start in the mid-1990s. The widening gap between the lived realities and available images/news sources of Palestine led to a great disturbance. Despite the 1993 Oslo negotiations, the discrepancy increased between rhetorical "peace" and the reality of land confiscation and occupation. Yet, as a result of the agreements, several ICT infrastructures, like telephone and the internet, finally became available for Palestinians (Chapter Two). Birzeit University launched its website in 1994, the first in

Palestine.[125] Another first early marker of Palestine's initial internet use was Muna Hamzeh's website for Dheishe refugee camp in the West Bank. She set up this refugee website in 1998 and gave voice to those living in the camp. Her website was probably the first virtual place for Palestinian refugees to share their stories with the outside world. Many more efforts aimed at creating awareness about the Palestinian cause (or helping Palestinians network with each other) were manifested through the possibilities of the internet. As the intro of *I am a Palestinian* website proclaimed: "Palestinians have names and faces. And now they have a voice".[126]

The increase of websites can be studied according to the different targeted audiences. *I am a Palestinian* is a good example of a specific style of website that targeted an international community, with the goal of raising political awareness. El Zabri's comment (opening quote) reflects the great effort to improve and strengthen Palestinian presence online. I will address this phenomenon through an analysis of several groundbreaking developments in connection to its techno-political context: the Arabization of the internet, the .ps URL struggles to attain Palestinian recognition in cyber space, and the rise of blogs. The second part of this section illustrates how different types of websites can be classified according to codes and categories.

Groundbreaking Developments

With *Solidarity Design,* (Picture 11) El Zabri put this theory into practice. The project offered complete development of professional Palestinian websites at no profit. This project resulted in websites like www.alaqsaintifada.org – with news about the Intifada, and www.rachellcorrie.org – in homage to the American ISM activist that was crushed by Israeli bulldozers. Some Palestinian website developments must be viewed in context of technological developments like: investment in proper translation, multilingual sources, easy interfaces, and surf options that broadened the scope and made websites more accessible.

The Palestinian website *Adalah* (Justice), launched in May 2004, works on legal advocacy cases for Palestinians, including filing petitions against Israel's land administration. They are also known for their appeals at the Supreme Court against using Palestinian civilians as Human Shields. Their press release stated: "Disseminating this news and opinion, and bringing it to the public's knowledge is especially important in a state where gross human rights violations against Arab minorities occur." They published the website in English, Hebrew, and Arabic, in order to reach as many people as possible.

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[125] However, after an exciting start for the BZU website as an organic link with student bodies mobilizing grass-roots solidarity and students participation, the site was loosing its capacity to inspire. It is not clear whether this has to do with the departure of particular key figures in the PR and IT departments who played an important role during this period of experimentation. They saw the internet as a tool to organize and mobilize rather than merely to disseminate administrative or academically-related information. One of the changes was the removal the *Complete Guide to Palestinian Websites* list from the Birzeit University website.
[126] URL 2002 www.iamapalestinian.org

A trend-setting breakthrough of Arab websites equalled the *Arabization* of internet. In the course of fieldwork many Palestinians mentioned *Maktoob* as an important example; this website was amongst the first to make a major leap by Arabizing its communication services. With three million members in 2003, *Maktoob* played a vital role in assembling Arabs worldwide.[127] Its primary aim was to facilitate communication among Arabs in Arabic.[128] They were instantly successful as the first multilingual web-based email service in the Middle East serving as an example to many subsequent initiatives. According to the manager of *Maktoob,* Sameeh, a Palestinian living in Jordan: "It provided a virtual community to Arabs around the world".

Maktoob offers various styles and several structures like live debates, chat rooms, websites, and email that many of the people I interviewed use. *Maktoob* served the Arab public through various services; it was, for example, the first initiative that assisted its members to find a partner via *mabrook.com*. People can send songs and dedications to each other, or engage in heavy debates. The chat section was one of the most active in the Arab world, and hosts a majority of users between the ages of 18-30. The chat room can reach up to 1000 participants at the same time. The most obvious political online debates were about Palestine (Chapters Three and Four). Some events sparked intense debates, like the live chat session with Souad Srour while she was in Brussels to indict Israeli PM Ariel Sharon for the 1982 massacres of Sabra & Shatila. *Maktoob* also organized a massive fundraising campaign for Palestine. From a review of their chat, email, *Friend,* and *Mabrouk* databases, discussion forums, and online voting, it appeared that the main goal (and effect) was the creation of an online Arab community.

Besides multilingual and technological developments, the Palestinian uprising during the al-Aqsa Intifada is the second main context for the groundbreaking development of Palestinian websites. The development of websites also offered a local/personal focus, especially those that started as homepages and later improved as blogs.

From Homepage to Blogging: Mini Revolutions

Locally based Palestinian websites increased and continued to professionalize Many aimed to reach international audiences. At first they started as homepages and then progressed into blogs. A academics, physicians, and journalists were the first to create Palestinian homepages. The BZU *Guide To Websites* offered a list of homepages by Palestinians living inside Palestine; it only offered a selected list of personal homepages by Palestinians in the diaspora because by that time there were already too

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[127] In 1999: 100,000 members, in 2001: 1 million, in 2003: 3 million, and in mid 2006: 4,5 million members. Source is Maktoob website. It was still regarded one of the most visited Arab websites by Palestinians according to an Alexa report in May 2006**.**

[128] Among others, it received the Best Information Portal Award at the Middle East Economic Forum summit.

many to be listed.[129] Palestinian homepages also provided lists of local and personal websites with hyperlinks and networks to-and-from them. Mazen Abu Hajleh, born in Libya, raised in Lebanon, and living in Australia, had a website with many links to Arabic sources and a section devoted to his collection of Palestinian homepages. His homepage said: "Sometimes you have to read about Israel to know Palestine, but you always have to read about Palestine to know Israel."[130]

Daoud Kuttab's Amin.org was another popular website in 2001, mostly known for its accessible information with both English and Arabic sections of articles related to Palestine.[131] The local homepage made by Hanna Safieh from the West Bank offered a beautiful collection of pictures of historic Palestine between 1920 and 1967. George Nimr Rishmawi offered the biblical history of Beit Sahour on his website as an ode to his hometown. These examples would see a further evolution of Palestinian websites. *Rafah-Today* website, for instance, offered a new type of online representation. It introduced Palestinian websites that were easy to create/maintain and run by people who don't necessarily work professionally in ICT or media. They became known as *blogs*.

Though not very common at the time of my first fieldwork phase in 2001/02, they were becoming more popular by the time of my second fieldwork phase in 2003/04. A blog is often like a personal diary that additionally offers (local) news coverage. As a new virtual subculture, bloggers were engaged in innovative forms of democratic self-expression, networking, global politics, media critique, and local/alternative journalism. Many blogs are increasingly political and over the last years a wide variety of left-oriented blogs have been created and have organized themselves in solidarity networks (Kahn and Kellner 2004:92). Besides *Rafah-Today*, *Tabula Gaza* became a well-known Palestinian blog*;* both are from Gaza. By gaining more legitimacy, and sometimes cited by mainstream media, these 'personal' sources have become part of the Palestinian information flows.

Such advancing technologies increased the relevance of the internet to political activism even more. Palestinian blogging turned out to be an important innovation; internet use furthered the cause for interaction, information, and construction of political relationships. The techno-political changes over the last 4 years and epitomized by blogs, led to websites undergoing radical transformations. Open source software has been developed to make untraceable blogs in response to the need for anonymity. In fact, this is one of the important reasons that blogs became very important in the Middle East. The combination of Arab interface and the safety of anonymous techniques, meant that blogs became a serious challenge to authoritarianism and oppression. Daring/non-conformist language (sometimes sexual or vulgar), in colloquial Arabic (instead of the usually classic Arabic used by the

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[129] One of the first recommended websites of Palestinians living outside was the one by Khalid Madam-Bey, a software writer who became famous on the internet because he wrote the widely used mIRC, the first multi-user chat system that allowed people to communicate freely by downloading the IRC chat software.
[130] His site was then found on www.geocities.com/SouthBeach/lagoon/8522 in 2000
[131] www.amin.org/pages/dkuttab

media), increased the popularity of blogs. The growth of such blogs in the Arab/Muslim world exceeded many expectations; the Open Arab Internet search counted approximately 40.000 Arab blogs, of which a majority were created in 2006.

Many were inspired by Egyptian bloggers, some of whom suffered harassment, were prohibited to travel (Hala al-Masry), imprisoned (Kareem Amer), and even tortured (Mohamed al-Sharkawy).[132] Egyptian bloggers participated in reform/opposition movements like *Kifaya* (*Enough*) and the large protests at Cairo's Tahrir Square in support of the Egyptian Judges that struggled against Mubarak's attempt to limit juridical independence. The dialectic relationship between online activism via blogs, offline political developments of major protest movements, and political mobilization in the Middle East, have encouraged many others to create blogs and reveal stories and news that would usually be concealed or bypassed by mainstream media.[133]

The direct link of on-the-ground activism/political upheaval with the increase in online activism, was witnessed in Palestine as well. Extensive research was conducted on Palestinian blogs and 192 Palestinian blogs were traced through quantitative analyses by the Palestinian @ Internet Society Project (P@ISP).[134] Based on this list, the team coded the sites according to 8 basic qualifiers (Appendix 1) and then made a content analysis of all the retrieved websites. From a comparative study of the blogs based on the different qualifiers, several interesting phenomena were revealed. With Figure 4 Rafal Rohozinski illustrates how the blogs correlated according to category, issue, and alignment. The findings show that blogs in the larger Middle East were generally framed by socio-cultural issues; while blogs from Palestine and the US tended to highlight political topics.

Within Palestine there were also differences; West Bank blogs focused more on issues regarding education and health, and Gaza leaned more towards advocacy and Islam. Furthermore, linguistic differences also appeared to be relevant indicators in our analysis; Arabic blogs more often focused on socio-cultural topics, while blogs in English were dominated by politics.

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[132] 2006 *Arabic Blogs: An Embodiment of Freedom of Expression*. In *Implacable Adversaries: Arab Governments and the Internet*. The initiative Open Arab Internet, at www.openarab.net. One of the examples confirming the potential threat was when blogger Alaa Abdul Fattah posted the picture of an officer that was enjoying oppressing demonstrators during a protest. The officer, notorious among activists for torture in police stations, was uncovered and challenged by the blogger online.

[133] See also http://www.al-bab.com/arab/blogs.htm for a reference to Arab blogs. Al Bawaba was one of the first services to offer free and Arabic blog hosting, http://blogs.albawaba.com/

[134] Palestine @ Information Society Data Set (2007). A joint project of the Advanced Network Research Group (Cambridge Security Programme) University of Cambridge, GOVCOM.org, and The SecDev Group. Project Principal Investigators: Rafal Rohozinski, Richard Rogers, Deirdre Collings. Core Contributors and Analysts: Wassim Abdullah, Miriyam Aouragh, Sam Bahour, Erik Borra, Michael Dahan, Isabelle Daneels, Anat Ben-David, Reem Fada, Adam Hanieh, Safa' Madi, Koen Martens, Nora Lester Murad, Andrei Mogoutov, Jamil Rabah, Micheal Stevenson, Nart Vileneuve, Mohamed Waked, Marieke van Dijk, Ester Weltevrede.

Palestinian blogs: category, issue and alignment

Figure 4: Network Blogs based on: Category, Issue and Alignment

Websites based in the Occupied Territories were much better available than websites by Palestinians living in Israel. While internet connectivity of Palestinians in Israel is higher, and the Israeli ICT among the best in the world, their web content was still considered much poorer than those in the Occupied Territories.[135] This difference again indicates that everyday politics shapes internet development. Another factor relating to this difference is the role played by Palestinian experts returning from the diaspora. As indicated in Chapter Two, post-Oslo returnees were important to Palestinian internet development in the OT. A crucial stage in these Palestinian ICT developments was the domain name: adding a new level to the *revolutionary* development of Palestinian websites. While Palestinian experts and investors worked together to put the .ps URL on the worldwide cyber map, the approval of the .ps for the PNA in the OT gave additional legitimacy to Palestinian websites. The internet was therefore regarded as a new gateway for Palestine when the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) finally delegated their country code, a groundbreaking and exciting techno-political development.

.ps: Re-Territorializing Palestine

> It is the gateway for Palestinians, something we have all been waiting for. It will back the Palestinian IT and internet, and introduce Palestine to a wider scope of the world; it is the address of Palestine.
>
> – Sabri Saidam, Gaza 2002.

During fieldwork in 2002, the battles against curfews and occupation saw a peak, but another struggle was also taking place: the "DOT-PS". Five years after having been requested, the country code domain was finally granted by ICANN based on a United Nations verdict for recognized countries and territories. In March 2000 the ICANN delegated the .ps URL as the Top Level Domain for the occupied Palestinian territories.[136] The 'dot' is the initial of a domain that identifies/confirms the territorial/state source of its web pages. It was a symbolic step for Palestine; it seemed to put Palestine back on the map.

The 'dot' can be considered as a signifier that helps mark national/territorial boundaries. The country code indicates the 'nation of origin' of the connected computers and websites on the internet. The international body ISOC (Internet society) played a major role in developing the constitution, formation, and regulations governing the performance of .ps. According to ISOC-Palestine Chapter, .ps meant the connection of all Palestinians to society and the diaspora. It was assumed that people would express interest in websites with their national initials, and help direct others towards specific Palestinian sources. I noticed during several interviews that

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[135] Palestinians make up 19% of Israel's citizens. See for example Michael Dahan (2003).
[136] Cisneros, Oscar S. *DOT-PS Domain without a Country.* Jan 12 2001, Wired News. http://www.wired.com/politics/law/news/2001/01/41135

this marker promoted pride and a sense of independence.[137] .ps offered an alternative for Palestinians who did not want .il: political recognition in cyber space that allows the eradication of the Israeli domain-name when referring to Palestinian sources.

The .ps faced many obstacles on its path. Palnet and other IT companies said this project was very frustrating. The discussion about the .ps created many debates and quarrels on the ITSIG mailing list. The implementation of the country code was complicated and continuously delayed due to the impact of Israeli policies. The import of equipment was sabotaged by Israeli border control and made difficult by everyday immobility due to curfews, closures, and travel restrictions.

Since .ps did not take-off until 2002, after the internet boom and outbreak of the Intifada, it meant that many websites already existed as .com/org/net. There were expectations that many would switch from these to .ps. Qadah, senior technology advisor to the PNA at the time, stated in an interview with Wired in 2001: "We expect that most Palestinians that are in dot-com or dot-org will move to dot-ps."[138] This tells us something about the *value* of the .ps for the existing Palestinian websites, and it can explain how the meanings ascribed to .ps allude to different outcomes. The .ps certainly has a *re-location* component; interviews and debates abound the online domain suggested that it is the virtual equivalent of a territorial, offline independence. It is necessary to clarify the .ps reference to a national territorial marker.

Palestinian Territory	**349**
United States	**266**
Israel	**39**
Canada	**39**
France	7
Germany	5
Italy	5
United Kingdom	4
Saudi Arabia	4
Turkey	4
Netherlands	3
Denmark	3
Sweden	1
Switzerland	1
Jordan	1
Norway	1
Malaysia	1
Total	**733**

Table 5: Total per (country) locality/registration of .PS sites (first sample 2007)

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[137] Of particular concern at the time was the *Jerusalem.ps* domain; they needed to "protect" this url because of its symbolic yet controversial (also claimed by Israel as its capital) implication.
[138] See note before last.

DOT-PS locality does not necessarily mean that it is 'stationed' in Palestine. Of the total 733 .ps websites collected in preliminary analyses in 2006, roughly half were based in "historic Palestine": as Table 4 shows, 39 websites in Israel and 349 websites in the Occupied Territories.[139] Of these total .ps websites, 305 were based in the US and Canada, 30 in Europe, and a handful originated in the Middle East or Asia.

Most of the websites were hosted outside of Palestine. The point is that there are different ways to frame our understanding of 'locality': location of the website server, location of website registration, location of the website's host company, or location of the website owner/developer. We qualitatively coded the sites looking at both .ps websites within the Palestinian IP range as well as outside. In addition we studied the "who is" data for all the .ps websites in order to identify the owner and where they (claim to) live. This 'centre of gravity' study of the websites hosted in and out of the Palestinian IP range did not show significant non-Palestinian registrants in the .ps domain.[140] After a thorough preparation and selection of the bulk of data, P@ISP was able to discover several important particularities. Figure 6 shows that the majority of .ps websites are registered with addresses within the Palestinian territories and hosted outside of the borders, mainly in the US.

During the intensive P@ISP study regarding Palestinian internet, over 1200 .ps URLs within the Palestinian IP range were collected and coded. The websites were analyzed according to important classification markers, such as content, alignment, location, orientation, audience, and language (see Appendix 1 for the scheme and sub-markers). Our study showed that .ps is predominantly used by political and commercial parties and several important conclusions could be made through the P@ISP. Simply put: .ps was not the main domain of Palestinian cyberspace. The new statistics thus confirmed the preliminary .ps data of Table 4, and the study reveals that the location-ownership-national identity connection does not necessarily prove that .ps is a significant online political marker.

One concrete example that .ps may mirror the everyday importance of the territory/national identity linkage, is the trajectory from pre-.ps (.com, .org, .edu) websites to .ps. By checking the Palestinian websites collected at the beginning of fieldwork and again in 2006, I noticed that, contrary to Qadah's expectation, many websites did not move to ps. From the selected ethnographically retreated list of websites between 2002 and 2004 in it was shown that only a small number of

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[139] These numbers are based on preliminary data gathered in preparation of the larger P@ISP in 2007, analyzed in the following paragraphs.

[140] Richard Roger's team also searched the major global registries (RIPE, ARIN, APNIC) to see if there were any administrative, billing, or technical contacts that listed Palestine, West Bank, Gaza, or Occupied Territories as their place of residence. This should have picked up the non-.ps/non-Palestinian IP range registrants that were Palestinian. Moreover, for possible non-.ps diaspora references we looked (through qualitative and quantitative analyses) at possible degrees of "Palestinianess" through links to other Palestinian websites. While we can't be certain about 100% coverage; we applied a very comprehensive approach and are able to know where there might be gaps.

Figure 5: Locality of .ps websites: Host/Registration

146
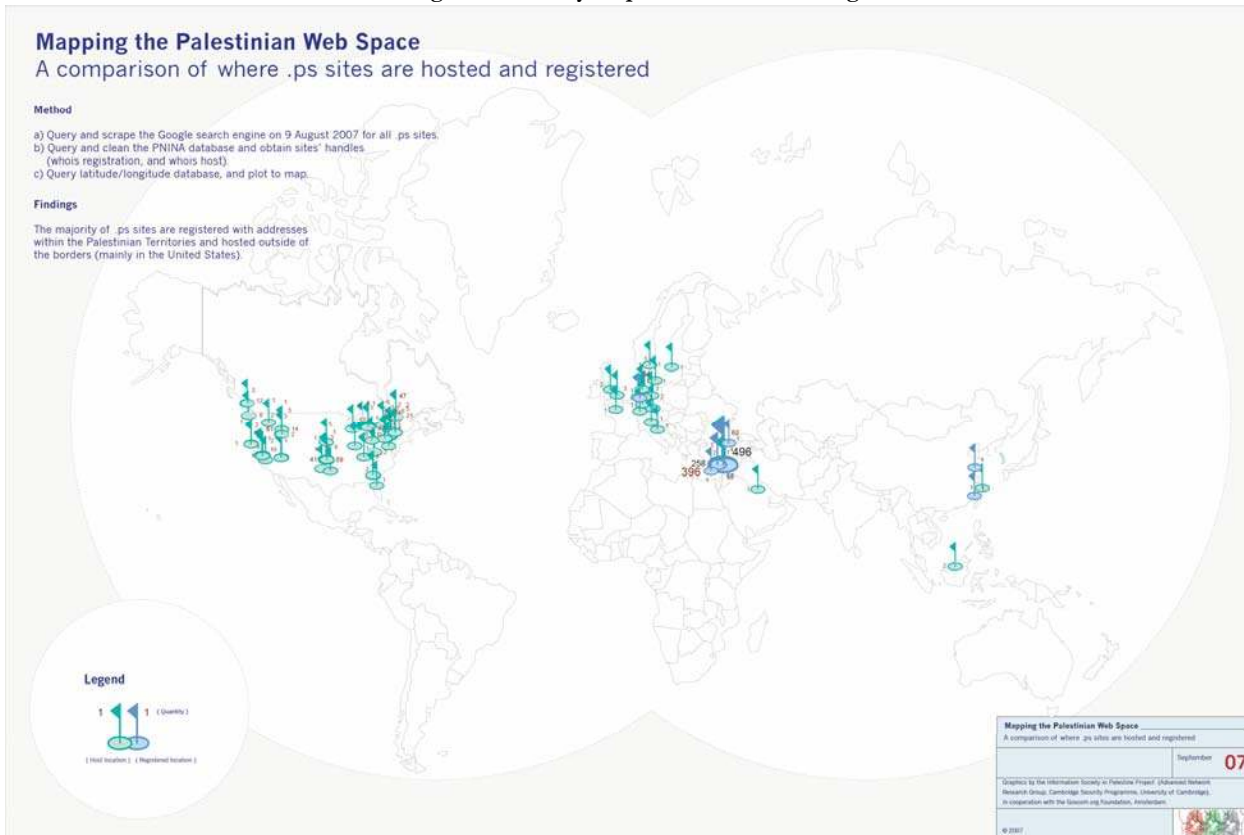
Palestinian websites migrated to .ps. This early conclusion was also confirmed by P@ISP analyses of Birzeit University's list. This does not assume a fixed conclusion because my list also contained URLs of non-Palestinian websites that Palestinians either visited often (chat/entertainment sites) or regarded as important for Palestinians (political movements in other countries). Nonetheless, Esther Weltevrede's P@ISP analyses of the old BZU list of website links (by using the Way Back Machine) led to similar results. It appeared that of 172 BZU links from 2002 only five migrated to .ps (one of these kept its domain name but with different content); seven websites duplicated the site and migrated to .ps while keeping the original as well; and five more websites had planned to migrate – they reserved the .ps domain name but have not activated it. Figure 6 shows the migration to .ps and offers a clear visual conversion of the results.
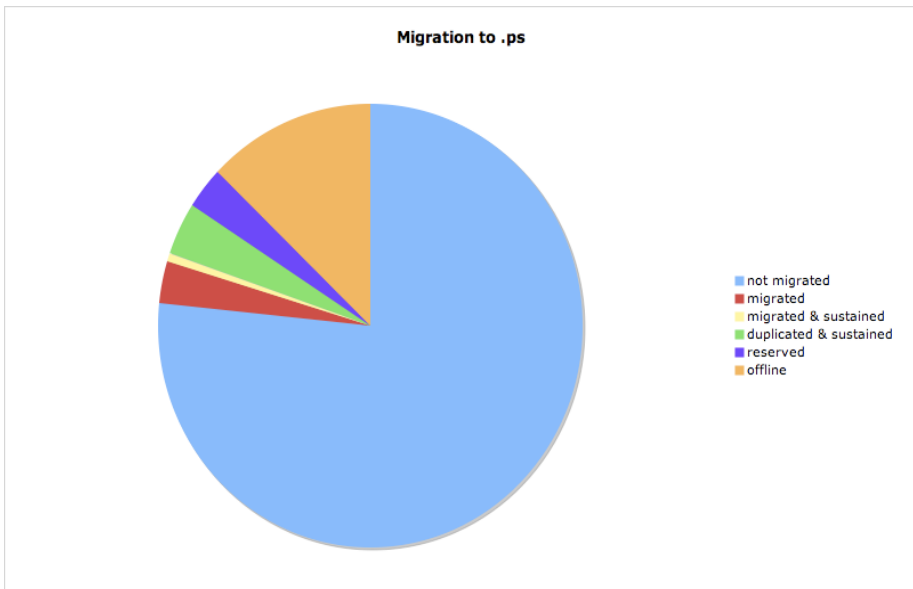
Figure 6: Migration of BZU linked websites to .ps

Surprising was the "Government and Services" sites listed by BZU at the time. We expected that more than other types of websites these would adopt a .ps identity. But of the 35 websites listed, only two duplicated (yet still sustained the original) and just one migrated. However, before jumping to conclusions, it is important to bear in mind that many of the "old/first" websites were inactive anyway. My manual analyses of the 2001-2005 website collection showed that 1/3rd of the websites were either dead (inactive) or stale (inactive for more than 1 year) by 2007. I propose that many did not (plan to) subsist and so did not need to move to .ps.

This discussion about .ps is significant because one of the crucial implications of website relocation concerns the expectation that websites are eventually followed/traced by their networks. By taking the three main Palestinian

university (Birzeit University, Ramallah / Najah University, Nablus / Islamic University, Gaza) websites as indicators during the P@ISP research, Michael Stevenson was able to show that of these three websites with both URLs (with edu and edu.ps), only Islamic University did not have an isolated network. Figure 7 shows the links to the three main universities and clearly illustrates the websites with and without a .ps policy. From the different networks of the three university sites, Islamic University gives higher value to .ps because they automatically redirect website traffic to their .ps site. The .ps seems to be undervalued by Birzeit and Najah University because the map shows only a few links pointed to their .ps websites.

Conclusively, the physical offline location of a website is not chosen on the basis of territory, but rather the degree to which the delivery mechanism makes sense for technical or financial reasons. And the push to adopt .ps has been largely unsuccessful, despite this ccTLD (.ps) being the only internationally recognized marker of Palestinian "sovereignty" and despite a push by the Palestinian community to adopt this domain name for Palestinian websites as a sign of "patriotism". In order to understand the unexpected results we need to add a qualitative/political layer to our analysis.
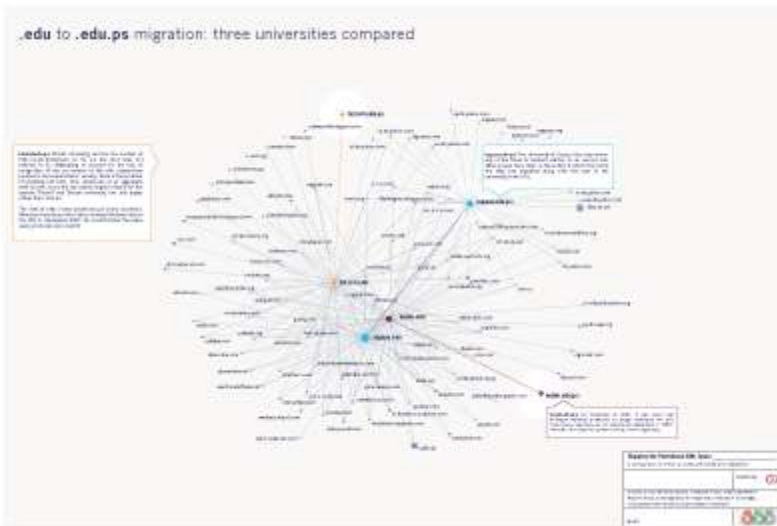
Figure 7: .ps reference of three main Palestinian universities (see Appendix 4)

I argue that the outcome regarding locality and .ps migration is the product of a two-sided context: offline territorial struggles are not necessarily mirrored in an online struggle, and, the great leap from Palestinian absence to Palestinian presence in cyber space happened *before* the .ps was allowed to operate. Thus, the low migration statistics also relates to the historical and political conditions that shaped the websites. Had Qadah been able to make this statement four years earlier—around the time .ps was requested by the PNA and many websites were already being created, and before

the Intifada caused a virtual boom—we would have probably seen a different outcome. The implementation of .ps was repeatedly delayed and equipment necessary for .ps operation was held back at Israeli-controlled borders. Meanwhile, the re-occupation of the Palestinian Territories began to take its toll on the people.

The point I make is that many website hosts/masters did not see it as a priority (anymore) to transform their websites into a .ps. Conclusively, and resembling any offline migration, the virtual trajectory discussed here is characterized by the political conditions the country/context was faced with. In terms of locality, assuming that .ps ownership is indeed a reference to Palestinian national identity, the location of .ps website owners is one indication of the 'grounded' characteristic of Palestinian web space. However, considering the highly transnational Palestinian community, and the large number of Palestinians living in exile in the diaspora, the location of a Palestinian website owner cannot fully explain/give value to a possible national-political reference to domain name. Hence, exiled Palestinians do not feel less Palestinian because they are not present on Palestinian soil. Palestinians share an imagined community with other Palestinians inside and outside the territorial centre, while simultaneously considering historical Palestine a very important point of reference (see also Chapter Four). The analyses of the .ps sources bring to mind the classification of the Palestinian websites I was engaged with since 2001. The longer my list of websites during fieldwork became, the more necessary it became to categorize them.

Classifying and Categorizing

> A truly public sphere for Palestinian opinion is lacking. I want to create a repository of all Palestinian oriented websites. Many Palestinian websites have tried to dump everything into one thing. It doesn't work, it's as if you walk into a library and find all the books on the floor. If it's not departmentalized and categorized, it won't help anybody.
>
> – Sam Bahour.[141]

Specific audience are targeted according to certain political goals. Part of the general critique expressed by Palestinian internet producers (and critical consumers) included the capacity to target Western audiences. In an effort to overcome the weakness of many Palestinian websites Bahour stated: "The key is to offer clarity and focus in order to catch the internet surfer's attention." This reflected my own motivation for a focused and categorized analysis of Palestinian websites because I had too many different types of website examples. And so I followed Bahour's advice in my own methodology.

Besides the well-known examples of Palestinian websites mentioned so far, I came across all sorts and sizes of websites in internet cafes and during interviews in Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon. Apart from these ethnographic and qualitative

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[141] Interview Ramallah 2002. His target was achieved by setting up the e-Palestine internet portal.

sources, there were also valuable references online. At the time three such comprehensive sources were linked to *Birzeit University, Electronic Intifada,* and *Passia.*[142] Many of the websites I came across at the time were related to chatting, news, and politics (including websites about victims of the al-Aqsa Intifada). Although most had a commercial target, 'politics' was everywhere on Palestinian websites, therefore it cannot be considered separately. Comments on the Israeli occupation or explicit solidarity with victims and protesters were also present on non-political websites.

Type: Originate from:	Activism	Religion	Entertainment	Government	Personal/family	Information
Palestine						
Diaspora						

Table 6: Matrix 1. Palestinian Website: Classification based on issue/alignment

This also meant potential overlaps in website types and categories. Whether activist, governmental, or news related, the dissemination of information has become a dominant objective for websites. Moreover, religiously-inspired manifestations/mobilizations are often part of the national political agenda. An organization like Hamas can be simultaneously activist, religious, and governmental. From viewing and collecting available websites, my aim shifted to an analysis of *how* the content and images of these websites were evaluated by different internet users. Nevertheless, in order to analyze the collected websites, I still identified them based on general content and the goal/alignment. In Matrix 1 (Table 6) I furthermore delineate five general markers: History & Culture, Activism, Entertainment, Government, Religion, Personal & Family, and Information.[143] The websites represented both local/Palestinian settings (*Palestine Remembered* or *Palestine Monitor)* as diasporic settings (*Jerusalemites* in Jordan or *Al Awda* in the US and UK*)*.

Matrix 2 (Table 7) and Matrix 3 (Table 8) offer an example of how I subdivided the markers "Activism" and "Entertainment" into 4 secondary markers in order to show how websites can be identified/categorized further depending on the prevailing focus/theme. This allows for a simultaneous representation of websites into different (sub-)categories. Furthermore, these typologies should not be seen as "fixed"; the Intifada game *Taht Ramad* (*Under-Ash*) can be a good example of Leisure as well as Activism–a merging of politics and fun.

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[142] One of the ways I checked how the listed Palestinian websites were rated is Alexa. Palestinian websites are here considered to be websites made by Palestinians and/or clearly addressing Palestinians in Palestine or the diaspora, but also websites that inspire and are used by many Palestinians in the Internet Cafes.
[143] In Appendix 1 I show how the basic website categorizations were further polished and specified during the P@IP in 2007 resulting in the 7 categories.

Type: Activism Originate from:	Intifada	Civil Society	Media	Refugees
Palestine	Hamas ISM Al-Aqsa-Brigade Jihad-Islami Ezzedeen-Qassem	PM Miftah	Rafah-Today ArabyNet Ramallah-Online PMC	Palestine-Remembered
Diaspora	Hezbollah AEL Manshour Arab-Nationalist Taht Ramad Electronic-Intifa PSC	Jerusalemites Solidarity-design Dying2Live	Palestine-Chronicle	Al Awda

Table 7: Matrix 2. Activism Subdivided

Type:Leisure Originate from:	Communicating (Email/Chat)	Heredity	Games	Music
Palestine	3oyoon	Hanaa Pls48 Palestine-Remembered		
Diaspora	Hotmail MSN		That Ramad Counterstrike	Star Academy Kazem Saher
	Maktoob Yahoo M-irc			

Table 8: Matrix 3. Leisure Subdivided

Compared to the time of my early research stage, when many websites were produced in the heat of the moment, the boom gradually decreased several years later. When offline activism decreased other online activities seemingly toned down as well. Some websites did not continue at all and disappeared from cyberspace, others became specialized/professional websites, and several were hacked. It is therefore important to note that the categorization and sub-division of the websites are not timeless or static. The way we interpret and classify Palestinian websites relates to

particular points in history. In Palestine this is definitely marked by the developments during the Intifada, with extreme stages between 2001 and 2004, and a peak in 2002.

General classifications based on online material on the one hand and on-the-ground lists on the other, showed a discrepancy in the way the websites were mapped. *Offline* popularity of websites did not correspond with initial observation/collection from my *online* networks where websites refer/link to each other. Some websites that were clearly present offline (mentioned to me in Internet Cafes or during interviews) were rarely or not mentioned on the link pages and reports I retrieved online. These present-yet-absent sources were primarily political websites that had sharper political analyses, or that galvanized resistance. This discrepancy attests to both the latent and manifest politics of representation in the production of Palestinian cyber space. I will return to this debate and further investigate this in the last section. After having studied questions of website localities, the next section regards the impact of *location* as the reference point of a websites' content/target. As I illustrated in the 3 matrixes, the websites can have global as well as local tendencies.

5.3 Globalizing/Localizing

While the quantity of Palestinian websites was impressive, participants I met were not always impressed by their quality. Some Internet Service Providers (ISPs) explained to me that some websites were only viewed by their producers and their direct circles. 'Websites are being created for the sake of being created' was a comment I regularly heard; they were not always adding anything meaningful to a project. The Palestinian community is one of the most politicized. There are many newspapers and other socio-political sources available. But with regards to websites and internet sources, the Palestinian articulated presence was initially considered weak, as stated before by Bahour. Active/critical internet users often directed their complaints at the Palestinian government, where the flow of technology and content was considered the most weak.

The groundbreaking developments I described in the first section had many positive impacts and altered the traditional relation between sender and receiver through the creation of new interactive processes. There are different starting points or groups/styles to trace when studying the evolution of Palestinian websites; I looked at localizing and globalizing (pro) Palestinian websites. If we want to understand the input of the internet users themselves, it is important to understand locally-based communications representing a Palestinian voice. When zooming into this Palestinian perspective, the two general types of 'localizing' websites I discerned were: personal homepages by Palestinian individuals and Palestinian websites predominantly engaged from a local perspective. These websites differentiate themselves in terms of local content but do not necessarily have to be personal. Some local websites specifically address international audiences with the purpose of building solidarity, like *Rafah-*

Today, while other websites overlap these divisions or have developed from one type into another.

Unlike the locally-focused sites, I have come across many global websites that are framed in terms of creating alternative self-representation and reach out to broad audiences. I will start by unravelling this global dimension of the virtual Palestinian representation before discussing the localizing websites.

Globalizing Palestine

For websites to become successful or survive, their producers needed to provide better content, focus, and technological use. Internationally oriented and 'professional' websites that work with (foreign) employees/volunteers understood this. Continuing his general assessment of websites at the time in 2002, Bahour said:

> The worst are government websites. The Ministry of Education posted a letter on their website and it was so unacceptable that I wrote them that a Minister of Education should be the last person to write an appeal to the international community in second-grade English. Even worse, the appeal was emailed as a scanned fax. They used internet as a medium without understanding that the audience is looking for flat text, and it took half an hour to download the thing because of the size of the Ministry logo.

According to Bahour, *Electronic Intifada* and *Palestine Chronicle* were premier examples of what could be done internationally. Both have clear-cut profiles and English reporting/commenting of Palestinian life and politics in a way that is accessible to international audiences. This 'American-made' approach is immediately recognizable by the way Western frameworks are copied. The quality of such (pro) Palestinian websites produced in Palestine and the diaspora was excellent. These trans-national websites showed that access to human/material resources is essential.

At some point the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) also realized it was not doing a good job, and the Ministry of Information set up *Palestine Media Centre* (PMC). PMC's overall strategy was to supply professional/up-to-date news and to shape international public opinion vis-à-vis the Palestinian political reality. The targeted audience shapes the style and, accordingly, sets the rules and principles of a website. Web design company InterTech, that set up the initial plan for PMC, stated how important user-friendly browsing/technology was, especially in Palestine. According to Marwan, web-designer at InterTech in Ramallah:

> Graphic design has a lot to do with the personal preferences of our clients, but 'simplicity' is our priority. We want accessible websites with the easiest navigation. Since we have to connect through Israeli-controlled telephone lines, heavy images and downloads are not practical for those accessing our websites inside Palestine.

Broad (international) dissemination and effective mobilization/participation, are indications of a successful website. It was therefore considered extremely important to have a simple framework for an 'English' audience. One such example was the

website *Palestine Monitor;* it targeted massive audiences and reached online visitors from all over the world. During an interview with Hanaa, one of the coordinators at *Palestine Monitor,* he described the impact of this unique situation as follows:

> I console myself by knowing that all regions are included in our audience now. The monthly registration of the top geographical regions on our site shows West Europe, Australia, North Europe, South America, Sub-Saharan Africa… Of course we have been getting hate mail from Israel and America as well, but we don't respond to it. We basically have the whole world visiting us. This is very important.

The September 2002 statistics report of *Palestine Monitor* demonstrated that it had been visited more than one million times that month, the highest reach ever for *Palestine Monitor* and probably the highest for any website in Palestine. September 20th was the most active online day of that year. When comparing these statistics with news reports and fieldwork notes, it was apparent that the highest number of visitors could be traced immediately after the IDF attacked Arafat in his Headquarters in Ramallah where he was under house arrest.

Further analyses of the website report showed that the countries (outside the region) logged into *Palestine Monitor* were mainly US, GB, Australia, Netherlands, and Canada. The fact that internet visitors from mostly Western countries were interested in these news sources substantiates the observation that mainstream Arab media already provided sufficient references to Palestine. The data/timeline mentioned here points at a direct correlation between extreme political moments and hits, and that the type of sources accessing *Palestine Monitor* varied from media, commercial, academic, and even military.

The most frequently requested pages of *Palestine Monitor* were those with on-the-ground chronicles, recent updates, and pictures. What this shows is that the existing and still dominant information gap was partly overcome by the internet. The websites are rich in content and provide alternative information: the importance of style and framing is not just a matter of personal taste or artistic choice. They convey political motivations or strategic choices.

Re-Humanization

> It's their money and their votes that decide what happens to me basically. … The internet is the first mass tool that provides us with direct access to the end user, without falling victim to pro-Israeli editors, or those with a different political agenda, so we must use it properly, especially to convince the American people. Murad, Amman, 2003

During the interview in Jordan in 2003 with Murad, the initiator of a website that appeals to the West, he explained the story behind *Jerusalemites.org.*[144] Murad hinted at

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[144] It is not a surprise that *Jerusalemites* was based in Jordan. There is a high concentration of Jerusalemites in Amman because most of the Palestinians that were expelled or escaped from Jerusalem during the '48 and '67 war ended up in Jordan. The Jerusalem Forum adopted *Jerusalemites,* as an Amman-based organization

his own personal inspiration to get involved in the website:

> When I went to Jerusalem I walked around with a strange feeling: for the first time in my life I realized that if anyone asked me 'where are you from?' I could say 'I am from here'. I thought, fuck it; these are my people. I never had this feeling before. When I saw the house my family owned before 1948 in Jerusalem, it was the same feeling. The house became an embassy listening post for the Mossad.

And thus he concluded: "The fact that I am still alive as a Palestinian, means I have to contribute even in the smallest manner; first of all for my self-respect, but also for my country." It took two years before the 'idea' became a website; It finally took place after his last visit to Jerusalem in 1999. The outbreak of the Intifada a year later triggered the website's development. Murad told me their aim was to portray a more 'civilized' image of Palestinians. "I deliberately put the image of a synagogue next to one of a church and the al-Aqsa mosque. The site tries to substantiate that Jerusalem is not only for the people who inhabit it at present but for all religions; just like Vatican City is for all Roman Catholics". His target was to appeal to the West, since he thinks that it does not help to portray the Palestinian voice in the Middle East: "I don't want to convince those who are already pro-Palestinian." His goal is to highlight the positive aspects of Palestinian culture. For this to succeed, the first impression is always important: "The opening line on the homepage was by the famous writer Khalil Gibran because I knew people in the West would react to that."

Formulated as *Let Palestine hug its people*, the website *Jerusalemites* reminded its viewers of the importance of the 3.5 million dispossessed and the stateless Palestinians. By making this point trans-national through internet, it enriched Palestinian unity. In this sense 'to hug you' can also mean to let the website/internet reconnect Palestine in a virtual embrace. The websites mainly intended to tell the story of the Palestinian people, while offering additional online material and statistics. Murad told me that he wants: "To make a connection between people inside and outside because we all belong to Palestine and Jerusalem." The need to represent the Palestinian people and their reality, or as Murad said "to civilize", can be explained as the desire to represent the Palestinian image.

Many sites seek to *humanize* Palestinians. Exemplary in this regard is a website created in 2002—a time when Palestinians suffered under the military sieges and the birth of curfews, but were often portrayed as being the problem instead of victims. It was called *Dying 2 Live* (Picture 27) and was made through the collective effort of Palestinian advertisers, graphic designers, writers, and art directors. *Dying 2 Live* portrayed Palestinian children in the image of their hero or idol, such as Albert Einstein or Che Guevara. Each of the pictures is associated with a child's personal story, introduced by the following text: "We are not a statistic. We have faces. We

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geared to explaining the human dimension of the Palestinian people and their attachment to their past, present, and land.

have names. We have hopes. We have dreams. JUST LIKE YOU". This phrase and image symbolizes a message directed at a non-Palestinian audience to whom Palestinians need to be framed in a familiar fashion.

Another example that appeared shortly after *Dying 2 Live* was the aforementioned *I am a Palestinian* website which described itself as, "A place for Palestinians to share their stories with the world to learn more about what life is like for Palestinians." The submitters were Palestinians from different places in the US and the Middle East, adding an international component. The stories on this site were sometimes sad but clearly attempted to generate political attention and support.

Rafah Today was successful both in humanizing Palestinians and, at the same time, persistently informing the outside world.[145] This website was dedicated to a town in the South of Gaza and was set up by a young photographer living and working in Rafah. Pictorially rich, exhibiting high quality photographs of everyday tragedies such as home demolitions and homeless families, he succeeded to penetrate the deafening silence about the tragedies unfolding in Gaza. During an interview 20-year-old Mohammed had the following to say about the pictures on his site:

> The photographs document what I am saying. I am sad when I cannot document or corroborate a story with a photograph because I feel the picture is proof of the reality…most important is that I report what is happening on the ground in Rafah…The site does not serve any real function for people who live in Palestine because they are already there; they know what goes on here… So I don't target Palestinians at all. Perhaps there are some Palestinian NGOs who refer to it, but the site is directed towards people outside, who do not receive such information.

Mohammed also offered official data that backed up his portraits and on the ground stories. Based on websites statistics he thinks that roughly 80% of his audience is from the United States. 'A picture is worth a thousand words'; this is the general motivation for including photographs of local places or particular events on websites. As real life documents (rather than for aesthetic purposes only), online portraits like these allow viewers to perceive Palestinians as real people. Images and stories testify to the everyday realities experienced in places like Rafah. There are also Palestinian websites that have many characteristics of a global website but actually appear local. For instance *Ramallah Online* website is a good example of the local/global overlap.

Localizing Palestine

Mohammed's talent combined with the fact that he lived in and was part of the war-like events in Gaza show that the grassroots participation from inside Palestine is of great importance. Among localizing websites there will also be differences in ownership and status, such as between institutional and more informal websites. Localizing yet 'official' are the *Al Bireh Municipality* or *Nablus Municipality* websites, for

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145 Which started as www.rafah.vze.com and became rafah.virtualactivism.net

example. They give information about the town's art, culture, and territorial areas through an online photo gallery. *Ramallah Online* is a more informal example of a site with a global look yet offering also information about Ramallah's history, culture, and society, and allows for interactive communication through its forum.

Several websites such as *Palestine-Net*, link to 'local site' in order to promote Palestinian cities and its special cultural qualities such as in Bethlehem. The struggle over the history and memory of Palestine was partly won when Palestinians managed to by-pass the traditionally limited media and founded websites and mailing lists. Much of the effort was devoted to offering alternative information in order to counter the silence about (and neglect of) the Palestinian exodus in 1948. This coincided with an important moment in history; in 1998 the Israeli government set up websites that celebrated the country's 50th anniversary without any reference to the Palestinian sacrifice for the birth of their nation. Technological and political developments motivated the style and structure of Palestinian online representation. For the purpose of commemorating 50 years since the 1948 catastrophe, alnakba.org was launched, and the website deiryassin.org also went online. Subsequently, websites got more and more professionalized and easier to maintain.

Some Palestinians did use their websites while themselves embedded in everyday colonial reality, like the personal website *Rafah-Today*. The homepage states its objective very clearly: "*On this website I present photos and reports about my hometown. About our life, our community, the home demolitions, homeless families, the children in our camps. About the tragedies that happen here every day.*" As he personally experienced the shocking impact of a house demolition in Gaza, the webmaster continued to photograph house after house being demolished by the Israeli army, counting more than 400 in 2003. Another example is *Remembering Jenin,* a website dedicated to recounting the story of the massacre and destruction following the invasions of 2002. Audio files of eyewitness stories were the testimonies available online together with a timeline of events, photographs, reports, and analyses.

Besides *re-humanizing* Palestinians for Western audiences, websites also helped to maintain a shared memory for the Palestinians inside and update Palestinians dispersed outside. The internet is used to empower the disempowered; the internet functions as a platform where Palestinians from different places in the world meet. Territorial references are an important political component of Palestinian identity: the map of Mandatory (1948) Palestine is a popular shape on necklaces, embroidery, art, and also websites. In fact, as argued in Chapter Four, cultivating the *imagined* Palestinian nation is a unique component of the online traversals by Palestinians. The discovery of Palestinian cities through internet pictures by Dali demonstrated this clearly. The way 15-year-old Shaker from Beirut told me about his online visits to Palestine made it sound magical:

> When you're cold you need gloves, when you're sick - medicine… but meeting a Palestinian from Palestine is like meeting your other half, the missing piece of the puzzle.

These online pilgrimages are like an echo of Benedict Andersons' (1993) references to the role that traversal plays in shaping a national imagination (Chapter Four); they parallel the *pilgrimages* that (colonial) civil servants made in the New Americas of the 18th century. The travel experiences of these educated middle class men helped to frame the territorial contours of the nation. Therefore, web surfing to Palestinian places and meeting other Palestinians online is like a *virtual pilgrimage,* as Khalili (2002) articulated with regards to young Palestinian internet users in Bourj al-Barajne. While Andersons' traversals are related to real travel experiences, Palestinians do not enjoy this mobility. It is therefore important to critically analyze physical and virtual mobility. The fact that Palestinians in exile do not have the option to enter their 'centre of gravity', gives more value to the 'inside', pre-Israel Palestine. The additional problem regarding Palestinian *traversals* is the lack of a concrete meeting point, a 'centre' for the exiled, although the point of reference is still historical Palestine.

Palestinians are still suffering from ethnic cleansing, wars, occupation, restricted movement, and institutional racism. There are clearly commonalities and differences between the classic understandings of *imagined communities* and the Palestinian experiment of nation-building (Chapter Four). Yet, new forms if interactivity and accessible sources do provide a creative way to *rediscover* a particular town or place, and constitute the key points in many diasporic traversals. In the words of Shaker from Beirut who finally *'found'* his roots:

> I visited Tarsheeha when I found a website with pictures and documents about it. I never saw pictures of my village before. It was different because I had pictured it like my grandfather described it, with the small houses and fields. But now it looks more like part of a city. I had mixed feelings; it shocked me because of the difference with how I imagined it would be. But I directly forwarded it to my friends and family and wrote 'this is the village where my mom comes from'.

Different websites were instrumentalized to locate such Palestinian places and meet with other Palestinians *inside*. These websites are the *localizing* tools for Palestinians in the diaspora, but also for those separated by the Wall and checkpoints.

The *Virtual-Palestine* website earned its name as one of the hosts publishing a comprehensive list of towns, villages, and cities in Palestine. Clicking on a name provides a direct link to information on demographics, photos of land scenery, stories, and memories associated with the town. People accessing the site can also post additional links and information. *Palestine Remembered* grew from a virtual testimony of the history of the Nakba to offering downloadable personal recorded narratives by the 1948 survivors. Mahmoud from Shatila told me about his experiences with *Palestine Remembered*: "Through that website I could see where my family fled from, and found pictures of Balad al-Sheikh, our village near Haifa". By comparing what grandparents had told them and what they found online, Shaker and Mahmoud offer insights into the local utilization of Palestinian websites.

Behind the Scenes

Palestinians in Lebanon and Jordan directed me to websites they regarded as important sources about/from Palestinians, or websites they personally liked very much. They mentioned, for example, websites about Palestinian towns such as *Beit Reema Online, Gaza Net,* and *Hebron Home*. Sometimes these were websites about Palestinian towns they were originally expelled from. The *Al Nakba* website was especially unique because of its counter-narratives and multilingual source.

But I also came across locally made websites by refugees in Lebanon like *Al Bareeq, N48, and Children of Shatila*. The motivations of groups and local organizations in the camps to set up the diasporic websites were very diverse; the youth in Shatila had set up a site to have their reality portrayed (Chapter Three). Apart from disseminating a particular political message, the participants felt it comforting to write 'our own story'. The local and everyday websites made or viewed by people in the camps showed that not only 'big' or fancy websites define the virtual Palestinian nation. Many of the websites offer a mix of content and links but on the local sites, music, politics, traditional culture, Islam, and history were much more fused. The people that set up such local websites themselves had presented a personal interest in a variety of themes, not specifically influenced by a particular type.

This *everyday production* of websites shows an intimate relationship between producers and their websites. 22-year-old Nazih from a refugee camp in South Lebanon found a site about his village in Palestine, *Al Bassah*. I inspired by sites like *Palestine Remembered* and motivated by his own internet hobby, he decided to make a website himself. Much of the content came from other sites and he downloaded online articles and pictures from the net. Mohammed from Nahr al-Bared takes pride in his website *Al Bareek* and invested a lot of work in it. He made an online forum where people could discuss and link up with other Arabs, not just Palestinians, as was his specific aim.

60% of the visitors log in from outside Lebanon. Mohammed tries to participate in matters that concern him as a Palestinian and stimulate new ways of thinking about the causes that effect his life as a refugee in Lebanon. As the name of the site suggests (*Al Bareeq* means 'shining') his aim is to shine light on matters that concern him. He also wants to convince his visitors about the Palestinian plight in order to mobilize as broadly as possible. In 2004 he continued to develop the site and added Voice Chat to enable visitors to talk with each other. During the course of building this website, he made close friends in several countries; together with two other young men from Syria and UAE he moderated the forum page. He got very enthusiastic when he logged on and saw that new people had been added to the forum or had visited his site. While showing his newest subscribers to me, he said:

> I think I achieve something for our cause. If convincing one person is good, how about when the number of people I reached is 126? And how about when they even come from different countries? That is what I call 'change'.

He believed that strong Arab unity is crucial for a solution for Palestine and was very disappointed with mainstream Western mobilization: "Instead of changing the way the West sees us, let us first strengthen and reform ourselves as Arabs." Apart from the additional costs that were needed to update the website with technological developments, he paid 50 US dollar a year for his web subscription. He managed to rebuild the site despite the fact that he was hacked. Together with the help of his online friends, he got the forum back online and continued hosting debates, mostly about Palestine and the conflict. Whereas the Arab forum was the core of his website, the site also contained an English forum.[146] Mohammed also gave informative links about all the refugee camps in Lebanon and an interactive link to the Quran, a 'cartoon of the week', and a poll.

In another Palestinian refugee camp (Bourj al-Barajne, Beirut), Akram could not resist the urge to make his own website either. Akram's website is mostly about the internet café that he managed in the camp. Unlike many other websites I saw, it was not dominated by national politics. The site was built step by step, each time adding something new, like small textual references and pictures of his activities, the costumers, and interior of the internet café. As his clients chatted, they sometimes passed on the URL of the site so that people online could see the internet café and how the clients use the net there (see also Chapter Six). Akram explained to me that this made his clients an organic part of the website:

> Many people check the site to search for pictures of themselves and then send it to their friends. When I sent the site to my friends in Canada and Europe they were surprised that there even was an internet café in the camp.

The site had links to about 50 other websites varying from similar sites of his friends to websites about Palestine, Al Jazeera, and online newspapers.[147]

As a response to the out of reach territorial 'centre of gravity', 22-year-old Ali from Bourj al-Shamali camp (South Lebanon-Sour) yearned to reinstate the 'other side' of Palestine, bringing the periphery closer to the centre by means of internet. In his words:

> The camp was a forgotten place for a long time. But with the internet this does not have to be necessary anymore. So I made a website about the camp, its conditions, our life, etc. Now we can reach the media and tell our story. We can exchange information with our people in Palestine and disseminate their photos and letters about the suffering of their people here.

These diasporic cases from Lebanon show the grassroots dimension of early attempts. But plenty of local 'informal' Palestinian initiatives in Palestine started with the same incentive.

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[146] But it hardly hosted any people, which meant his audience were predominantly Arabs.
[147] Url was www.aoweiti.com but is not active anymore as Akram left the country.

Almost at the same time that the Second Intifada broke out, alcarma.com was featured on a regional television program resulting in thousands of hits to the site. Local residents and friends of Hicham participated in the website by contributing news and stories. People from villages and camps emailed their local news about clashes or accidents. In Hisham's words: "If someone from Jenin studying in the US wanted to know what happened in his neighbourhood, he could go to our site and see. We also had an announcement board where people could celebrate birthdays or send their regards." During our meeting in Ramallah, Hisham lucidly represented the significance of this kind of community-based internet (Chapter Six).

Live radio programs broadcasted via the popular radio station *Radio Amwaj* were a driving force of the *Al Carma* website. When *Al Carma* could not continue after being destroyed, others took the lead and some had success and developed into professional initiatives that were visited by many people.[148] However, what also matters in the assessment of Palestinian websites is their everyday evaluation as virtual alternatives. People had different opinions about the websites and experienced the impact of websites in a variety of ways.

Impact

There was a wave of excitement as people were able to move from one place to another online and visit (online) Palestinian places during their virtual travels. Several questions arise from these practices; I am very interested in the everyday-life experiences and motivations of internet users themselves. As I wandered the online and offline spaces in search for Palestinian participation, I also discovered differences in internet traversals. It seemed there was less internet participation by Palestinians in Jordan then in Lebanon and Palestine. One of the overall reasons I given by local internet users/producers was that telephone, post, and border exchange between Jordan and Palestine were relatively normalized. This explains why Palestinians in Lebanon use the internet much more to contact Palestine since this kind of direct communication is unimaginable for them.

The greater need for virtual escapism among refugees in Lebanon, where it became a cyber political outlet in general may have also influenced this difference. Despite the fact that there are obvious differences between an offline and online pilgrimage, the idea of some sort of pilgrimage that strengthens national belonging is interesting in the online context. *Palestine Remembered* was also one of the global reference points for Palestinian history and identity that was mentioned many times by Palestinian refugees who don't have normalized communication with Palestine. This website was mainly used for collecting specific information about their particular family history and village/city. It was often mentioned as the place to simply 'see

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[148] The visits to Hisham's internet café where the website started were a reminder of the military impact as well. The military attacks destroyed the internet café and pro Israeli hackers ruined the website, ultimately putting an end to Hisham's internet enterprises. I will discuss this in Chapter Seven.

Palestine', thus satisfying a visual need. The site provides pictures, maps, and profiles of prominent figures and places. In doing so, it preserves the memory and experience of the Palestinians; by allowing Palestinians to attach stories, memories, or pictures on the site, it generated a medium for the presentation and sharing of these personal experiences. The sources are indeed impressive, like the detailed information of the 420 villages that were ethnically cleansed in 1948.

Internet cafes had to deal with increasing demands from eager costumers that asked to be hooked up with Palestine or that requested to be shown a website about their original village (Chapter Six). The announcement of an electronic gallery by a young artist in Palestine made an impact on the interviewees. The young artist, Sami al-Haw from Gaza, presented his online exhibition in February 2004 with a collection of surrealistic paintings that expressed profound personal depths.

Palestinians I interviewed gave me a wide variety of websites, such as *Hamas, Ezzedeen, Amr Khaled, Hanaa, 3oyoon, Arab48,* and *Gaza Press*.[149] The relevance of adopting a local perspective goes beyond the listing of website names and analysing Palestinian internet does not lie only in a localized presentation. *Hanaa* was mentioned to me several times during interviews in Jordan and Lebanon. It combines Palestinian culture and politics, including the section on *100 lives-100 Shaheed* (martyrs). People often used this website for the virtual cards with images of Palestine that the refugees sent to their (online) friends. From the above websites and experiences I conclude that internet and cyberspace development presented new opportunities, but also challenges, for online representations of Palestinian narratives. This verified the discrepancy to me between the offline and online analyses and confirmed that online linking needs to be deconstructed from a political perspective as well.

5.4 The Politics of Online Analyses

Some websites became widely known in a relatively short time because other (successful) websites advertised them on their main page. On the main page of the well-known *Palestine Chronicle* was a banner for *Dying 2 Live*. As pointed out before, I shifted from collecting Palestinian websites to analyzing how they were presented and evaluated by Palestinians offline. Obviously, the answers depended very much on personal interests, style, experience, or financial possibilities (surfing sites and getting to know these sources better assumes enough time and money to access the net). The interviews about the impact of websites and having distinguished different kinds of websites, offered a variety of perspectives. When I divided Palestinian websites based on the presented context and aims, different types appeared that I wished to further classify. Internet users in Lebanon showed me websites related to such classifications with examples like the entertaining *Star Academy* (Arab version of *Idols* and a big television success at the time), *Intifada.com* and *Hanaa.com* (Palestine and Palestinian

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[149] www.ezzedeen.net, www.amrkhaled.net, www.arabs48.com, www.gazapress.com are sites in Arabic.

politics), and *Islam Online* and *Amr Khaled* (religion and Muslim lifestyle, famous television Imam, .

The division of websites according to their *localizing* or *globalizing* character gave insight to the type of audience and topic the producers targeted. Moreover, local websites that were made or visited by people in the camps confirmed that big and fancy websites were not the only ones defining the virtual Palestinian nation. Such unravelling of Palestinian online presence and utilizations thus deserves more elaboration. The aforementioned links to other websites are a useful way to determine the *prominence* of a website online. A categorized scheme was developed derived from on-the-ground and online observations (according to which I analyzed the content of the sites). The main categories guiding my analysis were: politics, Palestinian history and culture, religion, entertainment, and news. The divisions were similar to the categorization I made before in the matrix and the way the list of links offered by Palestinian websites are structured. This gives evidence to the fact that the analytical, *ideal,* categories match with those mentioned by individual participants. Some websites show that categories regularly overlap; this is partly because websites tackle different issues at the same time (especially in politicized communities).

In 2002 I started categorizing and visualizing possible networks; in 2005 I further worked these out, and in 2007 I continued with a wide-range analysis of a large bulk of Palestinian websites.[150] While tracing and observing these websites, the online representations of Palestinian identity vis-à-vis offline preferences became intriguing; besides matching with some of our online tracking they also showed some clear discrepancies.

Links and Networks

> The combination of quantitative and qualitative network analyses might, perhaps at the expense of some advanced quantitative ad mathematical elaborations, make the network approach more attractive for communication research (Van Dijk 2002:19)

It is intriguing to know who refers to whom in the virtual space of the internet; it is in fact essential, in order to better understand the correlation between online and offline networks. Observable linkages usually represent social relations or political affiliations (Scott 1991). This perspective makes online research an important tool in one's general methodological approach. A systematic analysis of patterns and linkages between websites is possible by applying social network methods to the online communities in question. The hyper-links from one site to another convey a kind of (ideological) closeness. Empirical/ethnographic research about the effects/usage of internet in social relations can be improved by quantitative (network) analyses. The Network approach has a good reputation in quantitative research, however, and as

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[150] The analyses in 2005 was carried out with research assistant Donya Alinejad. The project in 2007 resulted from a collaboration with the P@IS Project as mentioned before.

Van Dijk articulates in the above quote, empirical attributes are needed for comprehensive social analyses. There are several computer programs that track hyper-links between websites and that can organize the retrieved data. However, such analyses by themselves can be unreliable when not grounded in qualitative research. The technologies used by P@ISP are up-to-date and the quantitative/qualitative combination one of the major strengths of its comprehensiveness.

The questions of (online) network analyses are also important for anthropologists. The problems that anthropologists deal with vis-à-vis network analyses involve the same kind of principles and realities as everyday-life, especially with regards to aspects of power and access. Discussed in an evocative text by Ulf Hannerz (1980) already three decades ago, it is still relevant to current hyper-modern challenges.[151] Thus, when I refer to power relations in network structures I also mean hyper-link structures. For example, it is also the case for the internet networks that a political group/movement may have a finite group of connections. Each of the connections included may have its own online networks, and some of those may also have a website or online mailing list that may eventually link to our source. This snowball effect can lead to an increase of political dissemination.

Van Dijk (1999 also describes a reconstruction of society through electronic networks and new modes of organization. He calls this is an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary process. By outlining a multilevel theory of network society he furthermore argues that all-pervading network structures make interdisciplinary and multilevel theory necessary. An interesting example of such a snowball was the *WebRing* of which *Free Palestine* website made good usage. A *webring* forms online communities for/by people that share similar ideas, and was offered as a link on *Free Palestine* to help find other (Palestinian related/friendly) websites. The extensive list of links to other websites then forms a connection point. Thus by becoming part of a certain ring a website can increase its readership. Free Palestine describes the ring as "For the friends, and those who wanna be friends of Palestine and all Arabs and Muslims!"

A problem with (online) quantitative analyses is the risk of neglecting new networks by reifying old ones. A related disadvantage might be the difficulty to include shifts that appear - i.e. the transformation of/into new networks. Online and offline communities are embedded in constantly changing political-economic developments. With respect to hyper-links between Iranian WebPages, Van den Bos (2006) argued that processing his data with software tools took nearly as much time as processing them manually. This does not mean that quantitative or qualitative methods exclude one-another. On the contrary, when doing research online the efficiency of quantitative technology and grounded and updated qualitative methods strengthen one-another. This multiple approach is important because it can help us understand the discrepancies between quantitative/internet examples retrieved online and sources recommended by local internet costumers during ethnographic fieldwork.

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[151] I am specifically referring to the chapter *Thinking with Networks* (:163) in his book *Exploring the City*.

Indeed, several Palestinians in the refugee camps pointed me to websites that were not linked or discussed by many of the websites I collected/researched online. This lack of referring, mainly to Islamic or radical political websites, is partly explained by the objectives of the 'globalizing' websites, namely the targeted audience, the language and style of communication, and a political agenda that is shaped by the *re-humanizing* tactic I discussed before. Political movements such as Hamas were absent in many 'official' networks; even after surfing and tracking down (pro-) Palestinian websites, it did not appear. In other words, relatively popular and 'big' websites like Hamas or Hezbollah, might find themselves isolated by a *cordon sanitaire* in cyber space. The clearest confirmation of online exclusion is when websites are not mentioned as important references or offered as hyper-links on "mainstream" websites. They clearly represented different kinds of websites that didn't fit the anticipated style and visions of the mainstream websites.

These online and quantitative explorations of the politics of online inclusion/exclusion were intriguing when compared to the general discourse about Muslim/Middle East internet. Exploration revealed some references to Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad, but they were often negative/stigmatizing, and the analyses said little about the websites' local and social relevance. For example, this statement in an article about Palestinian political websites: "The websites publish the pictures and history of the terrorists killed in suicide bombings."[152] During several interviews about this topic, internet users/producers told me that the lack of reference to online Muslim sources was also related to prejudices about a presumed disinterest in modern technological developments of Muslims.

Muslim Online Presence

Beside the above mentioned representation of Muslim sources, mass media in general Mass media tent to emphasize Palestinian politics in terms of religious extremism (see Chapter One).[153] However, I noticed that many of the online Palestinian sources have an activist 'tone' and are reminiscent to a certain political enthusiasm/drive. Visual/textual rhetoric's are essential for public relation strategies, and will be even more characterized in ideological examples. Thus when looking at internet expressions through the prism of Palestinian politics, I detect an 'oppositional' framework promoting struggle (in different degrees) against occupation at its core message.

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[152] For example 'Chats with Hamas on the net', Haaretz 11/12/2001 Daniel Sobelman. Also typical is the often reprinted piece *Collecting and analyzing the presence of Terror on the web: A case study of Jihad websites* by Hsinchun Chen, Jialun Qin, Edna Reid, Wingyan Chung, Yilu Zhou, Wei Xi, Guanpi Lai, Alfonso A. Bonillas, and Marc Sageman

[153] Ascribing of Palestinian political representation seems also reflected by (alternative) news/academic examples vis-à-vis Palestinian online. When viewing for example Wired Magazine articles about Palestinian internet between 2000/2003 to give precedence to coverage of (religious) activism online, and discussing cyber war, 'Electronic Jihad' on particular extremist websites. Bunt (2003), who actually himself coined 'Electronic Jihad', acknowledges that these exposures are problematic and, more importantly, unrepresentative (:46).

Moreover, it is argued that many websites in the Middle East have a religious orientation (Zelaky 2006), thus it is clear that *Islam* does not discourage technological innovations or internet use. As any other religion, Islam knows diverse (local, regional, political, class) interpretations and therefore *the Islam* does not exist.[154] Many of the 'Muslim' online examples give a very different picture and there is a spectrum of Muslim websites, varying from groups based on violence like al-Qaeda to free-thinking philosophic Sufis, all interested in the internet (Eid 2007). Several scholars have convincingly refuted symplistic interpretations by moving beyond essentialist premises and showing how such views on Islam do not relate to everyday practices. Contrary to primordial analyses about Muslim culture/ideology that it (supposedly) opposes modernization, they have succeeded in proliferating views about Islamic political movements and Muslim communities shaped/set by historical transformation and political/economic contexts (Bayat 1996/2007, Moors 2004, Ramadan 2004, Van der Veer 2001). And as has been argued in for instance the powerful work of Saba Mahmoud (2005) and the interesting contribution from a European context by Nadia Fadil (2008):a process of modernization does not similarly imply secularization.

Internet technology is the clearest manifestation of the juxtaposition of political Islam and modernity, as manifested in for instance the work of Eickelman and Anderson (2001). According to Helga Tawil (2006), the rise of Islamic movements in Palestine illustrates how internet users exploit the very tools of modern society to strengthen and re-institutionalize the fundamental core of their Islamic faith and political objectives. Muslim religion in general, and fundamentalist orientation in specific, may very well shape modern approaches as well as utilizing them, confirming that traditional/religious beliefs are certainly open to ('modern') changes and creatively adapting to technological developments, an argument Olivier Roy (2004) also made.

Online representations have a broad diversity with respect to different cultural, political, and linguistic concepts that can be associated with Muslim identities. In fact, cyber Islamic environments are already shaped by 'Islamic' symbols, images, sound files, including opinions about what is and what is not 'appropriate internet' (Bunt 2000). Moreover, what makes a website 'Islamic'? Many Muslims actively use the internet as a trans-national platform to propagate or disseminate messages. Through various popular newsgroups and email discussion lists, Muslims can solicit information about what 'Islam' says regarding any issue (Mandaville 2001). There are many examples of Muslims enthusiastically participating in internet projects and websites that do not relate to specific political, let alone 'radical', ambitions.

Religion teachers and technology experts worked together to set up the al-Azhar University website enabling Islamic scholars worldwide to access information without having to perform onsite research. The Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, was concerned about manuscripts that needed renovation;

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[154] Noteworthy is the fact that there has been a strong presence of technical experts in the cadres of Islamic parties. For instance, Hamas was particularly dominant in the computer and engineering departments in the student blocks at BZU in the West Bank (Aouragh 1999).

the preservation of the precious books was the initial aim for seeking electronic solutions. More than 100,000 books and manuscripts were digitalized. The project manager pointed out that the site could also help correct misconceptions propagated in the West about Islam.[155] The site started out bilingual (Arabic-English) and continued to operate with more languages. In addition it offered transcripts of sermons by the Grand Imam and a virtual tour of the institution. [156]

Moreover, the online fatwa and email system allowed al-Azhar scholars and Muslims throughout the world to request a fatwa and to interact. Bruckner (2001) showed how the distributions of fatwas became a popular component of many Islamic websites. In 1999 he traced more than 10, 000 online fatwas; this number grew to over 14, 000 by 2000.[157] An interesting part of the many online and offline debates was whether there should be a fatwa about the internet itself - i.e. whether the internet is considered haram or halal, when and under which conditions.

I talked with ISPs in Palestine and Lebanon about the character of the internet and its relation to Islamic morals and rules. It was clear that for Islamic organizations, gambling and pornography were the only features not accepted. In this regard it is interesting to note that, although governments rarely appreciate the availability of alternative (powerful) voices, attempts to close down opposition on the net are barely heard of in Palestine. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, whether left, right, Christian, Muslim, or refugee, all Palestinians face a common enemy. Secondly, the Palestinian government does not have the authority or means to control and monitor the internet in either technological or infrastructural ways.[158] This inspired me to ask Joki at *Palestine Monitor* whether the end of the Intifada would potentially mean a decline in the use of internet. And she answered: "New situations create new questions, after intifada maybe we will be engaged with what kind of state we want and need. That will motivate more or other websites, online actions, and online debate." This was a prophetic analysis considering the impasse of the Intifada, and the electoral losses by Fatah/takeover of Hamas.

Like in offline society, not all groups on cyberspace (want to) engage in active dialogues. However, the *Palestine-info* website (Picture 25), host to the major Palestinian political movement Hamas, is eager to push their info through the internet, in languages extending from French to Malawi. In 2003, this Hamas website scored 246, 000 on Alexa; in 2006 it was roughly the same, which actually meant a considerable increase considering the amount of new websites that joined in the meantime. In fact, in his study about political participation on the internet during elections in Palestine, Hanieh (2007) shows a strong growing proliferation online.

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[155] Sherine Bahaa. Cyber Islam. Al Ahram Weekly, 27 Feb. – 5 March 2003 (issue No. 627)
[156] Idem. The project was financially initiated by UAE prince and minister Mohammed Bin Rashed Al-Maktoum He had an additional interest in promoting electronic technology as he owns a multimedia company and is involved in web development & design.
[157] Mathais Bruckner, *IslamiCity Creating an Islamic Cybersociety*. ISIM 8/01:17. An interesting part of his description concerned the religious debate on calling a fatwa about the internet, ie, wthether the internet itself is haram or halal.
[158] More in chapter 6

Again, time and place are very important. In Palestine, the Islamist/resistance movements had other priorities. But later there were serious changes in the political structures: Hamas decided to challenge the dominant political/power balance by competing with Fatah in the local and general elections in 2005/6. Since 2005, the Hamas-related websites and discussion forums clearly became a prominent voice online (Hanieh 2006). Thus the Islamist tendencies were partly absent before due to everyday/national-liberation factors on one side, and online exclusion on the other side.

As mentioned before, mainstream media mostly wrote about radical Islam and Muslim internet use in terms of *cyber Jihad* or online *radicalism*. According to some references about Hezbollah and Hamas sites, they are merely rhetorical and not interested in the international community. They are considered to be mainly interested in a local/Arab audience, whom they believe they can influence or mobilize for Jihad.[159] But while searching these internet examples I found that many Islamic political websites are multi-language and in English as well. So it may be argued that it is *more* focused on an international Muslim community, rather than *not* interested in the international ('Western') community. Even if they are less interested in Western audiences, this is not strange considering that the West excludes them as fundamentalist or (potentially) dangerous.

Even *Maktoob*, though certainly the image and profile of a secular site, responded to the popularity of Muslim celebrities. *Maktoob* cooperated with the popular television program and website of Amr Khaled through a live interactive connection with Amr Khaled. *Maktoob* members, amongst them many Palestinian, had the possibility to engage in a live debate with Amr Khaled himself. This example symbolized two things: Palestinian internet users are not only interested in national/political issues; Islam is already organically linked with internet technology.

The popularity of the Egyptian Amr Khalid among many of the interviewed is certainly the result of his highly popular [satellite and internet] programs viewed in almost all Arab countries. Amr Khalid does not look like the stereotypical Sheikh often portrayed in the West with long beard, robe, and talking in complicated Arabic with a slightly aggressive tone. On the contrary, some of Amr Khaled's discussions were funny and others tended to be dramatic or emotional. Amr Khaled, wearing a Western suit and a short trimmed moustache, doesn't hide his emotions or personal expressions during a Quran or Hadith recital. As the camera zooms into the audience, we see a mixed crowd of women (veiled and unveiled) and men. At the end of the program, people are encouraged to visit the website or send an email. 23-year-old Nihad from Shatila-Beirut is a fan of Amr Khaled and regularly visits his website. Motivated by him, she wanted to counter the Islamophobia in the West:

> Amr Khalid asks from people, guys and girls, to go to the internet to chat with people in Europe and to explain to them about Islam, to encourage them to visit Islamic websites, in order to better understand Islam.

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[159] Shahar Smooha '"Terror on the net with an olive branch" Haaretz, 2002/06/20.

The 18-year-old Ibtisam from Bourj al-Shamali was more interested in personal feedback from Amr Khaled:

> You can ask him anything via the internet. I sent an email last week regarding something that I am not sure whether it is allowed as a Muslim.

Uncovering this inclusion and exclusion of particular Muslim representations via interviews and network analyses is relevant in order to discover how open the virtual public spheres are.[160] It helps to clarify what forms of selectivity (and secrecy) we can find on online public spheres. Several tools, like Alexa, *Google Analytic*, and manual comparison of links can be used. A list was made based on the websites I heard of via interviews and found on the highest Google inventories, this categorization helped to understand and conceptualize 'virtual Palestine'. Through a manual experiment I explored which Palestinian websites refer to each other. The hyper-link information found for 6 Palestinian websites were coded and depicted in the diagram of Figure 8. Website 1: *Hamas,* is 'isolated' and has an asymmetric relation to the rest of the (pro) Palestinian websites. Website 4: *Electronic Intifada*, has the most centred relation compared to others. Due to its dense relation we can say it is popular or 'relevant' and, in any case, an influential network source. The arrows represent the out-going hyper-links found on the website. The remaining sites are outlined in grey because they do not have outgoing links, or at least not immediately on a clear link page/list. These sites include *Electronic Intifada* and *Palestine Information Centre*. The thick arrows depict links that are directly bi-lateral, that is, they connect two websites that mutually link to one another and show their relative density and grouping.

One of the evident observations from the diagram is that *Palestine Monitor* is the site with the most outgoing links. Its arrows reach to the greatest number of other sites. On the other hand *Electronic Intifada* is the most linked-to website. But perhaps the most obvious point is that the *Palestine Information Centre*, the official website of Hamas, is the least linked. The network is most dense around the *Palestine Monitor* and *Electronic Intifada*, while it appears least dense in the vicinity of the *Palestine Information Centre*. Once we establish that these two areas of the network represent a sort of centre and periphery respectively, a further point of interest is that, as we can see, none of the "central" sites connects directly to a "peripheral" site. For example, there are no arrows directly from *Electronic Intifada* to *Palestine Information Centre,* rather they are connected only through one other site, namely *Palestine Remembered.*

Yet, an interesting finding is that W1/Hamas has a similar number of hits and at specific moments had more visitors, thus it is also 'influential'. Alexa statistics

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[160] Several of the websites I used to know offering good lists of links either altered their format, like *Electronic Intifada* who changed their Links to Topics with content references rather than websites. *Palestine Remembers* had a direct link to the *Electronic Intifada* old link page format. Hamas did not offer links at all, and *Indymedia*, which use to have good updated content and link references was completely inactive after 3 years of the Intifada. What also became clear is that the type of websites being linked to corresponds to the goal or theme of the website, thus *Palestine Monitor* and *Passia* refer to many other civil society websites. This correlation may also be an explanation for the exclusion of certain websites.

(May 2006) of *Hamas* shows an average daily reach of between 40 and 60 million, with *Electronic Intifada* a bit higher. Yet at the same time the statistics show clear differences. Alexa) showed that 235 sites refer/link to *Hamas*, while more than 1, 300 websites at the time were linked to *Electronic Intifada*. Consequently, although a website is rarely referred to by others, it does not mean the website in question is not popular or meaningful: these 'redundant' websites get around by other means. But knowing that Hamas or Hezbollah websites are not on the link page of most (Pro) Palestinian websites, it is even more interesting to see that they are intensely surfed and referred to. In other words, they had other networks and connections besides these hyper-links.

Beside the newly evolving technological means at the time, simple as it might seem, these other networks were the mouth-to-mouth, face-to-face, and internet café or chat room shared references. As in our offline lives, there is apparently not *one* online public sphere, but a number of spheres with diverse degrees of openness and network styles. The internet-meditated public sphere is thus fragmented as well as overlapping. It is essential to remember that most surfers don't just endlessly browse for websites, but usually go to, or search for, a particular kind of website. The point a respondent made in the refugee camp internet cafés about financial constrains is also a reason. Again, that is why 'networking' is indeed important, and although not determinant, the *Link* page on websites is a powerful tool. Especially in the case of the Hamas website because it does not use its name in the URL (for tactical reasons); this makes a spontaneous or quick search for Hamas less productive and direct linking more relevant. Technological improvements after 2005, such as RSS-feeds, also signify an important development in the politics of networks. This is later confirmed by P@ISP and will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Many political Islamist websites like Hamas are present and participate in the cyber-war between Israel and Palestine (Chapter Seven). This is also reflected by work that focuses on how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is constituted online (Bunt, 2003). Though it remains striking to find Hamas, Hezbollah, and even the secular Marxist PFLP and DFLP excluded from main Palestinian website networks. I argue that the reason is not so much political disagreement with these movements. In the words of Hanaa, the webmaster of *Palestine Monitor*:

> First of all we don't link up to Christian sites either, and we are a non-political organization. But I wouldn't feel comfortable linked with Hamas. If you say 'Hamas, many outside associate it to terrorism. We want to get people's attention to other things besides, for example, suicide attacks. It is an international audience that we target and we need to fight against these strong stereotypes. Ramallah, 08-2002.

The dominant Palestinian political analyses that emerge online do so within a secular nationalist framework rather than a religious one, even those by Hamas or Hezbollah. This ideological representation, facilitated by the internet, shapes the

Palestinian online image towards a wider secular internet public, because the conflict is considered essentially political, not religious.

Many websites, not only *Palestine Monitor*, display a general absence of religious ideology, while a national/secular agenda is evident. (Pro) Palestinian internet sources do not relate to Islamic references and contributions. Often it is for fear of being associated with 'unwanted' groups or loosing credibility/support, or even becoming a target of cyber war for merely linking to them; in other words, for fear of being 'guilty by association'. This is understandable in light of tightened policies and attacks on civil liberties after 9/11, which many of the interviewed activists referred to as anti-Muslim (and 'McCarthyist') tendencies.

Figure 8: Manual net analysis of 6 'popular' websites
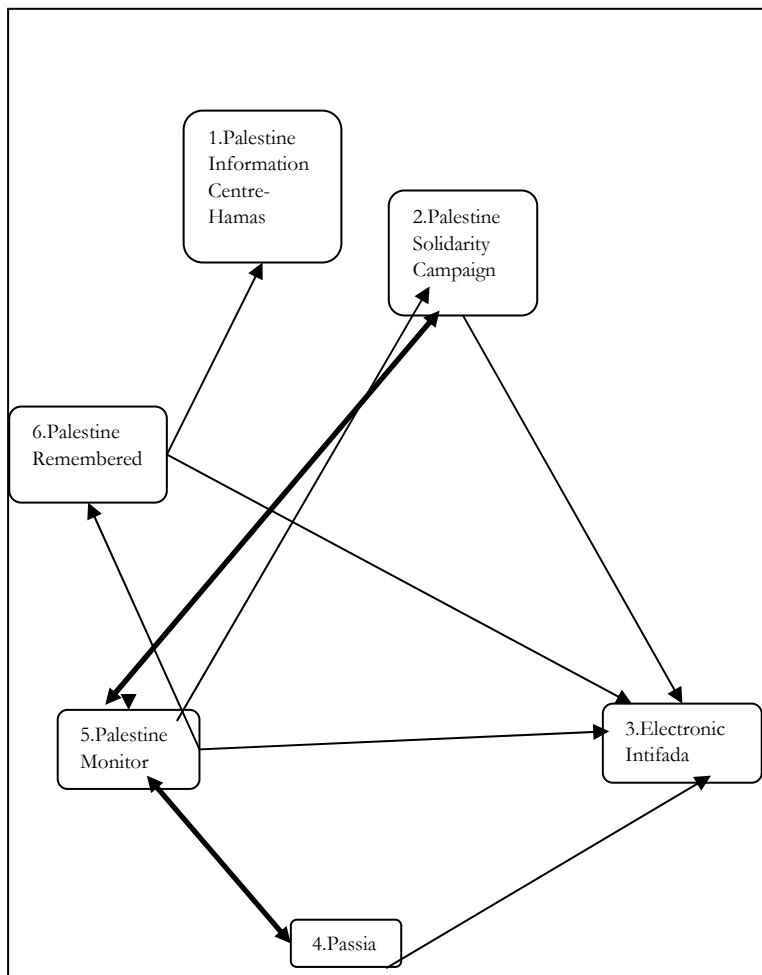
Another reason is the aforementioned politics of targeting western audiences with the aim to *rehumanize* the Palestinian people and mobilize solidarity. The *Free Palestine!* mailing list that started November 2001 called itself "A secular voice in the electronic wilderness". It explained that it is 'irreligious' so as to maintain its main focus on the political matters; ethnocentric/biased views related to Islam and the Palestinian-Israeli context (successfully) distract from solidarity and resistance to colonial politics.

5.5 Conclusion

The expansion of the Palestinian internet scene was illustrated by the launching of countless (pro) Palestinian websites. The main classifying factors in this chapter regarding the growing number of websites were the different targeted audiences and the territorial reference and framing. The distinction between globalizing and localizing website inclinations helped to explain the politics behind them, predominantly in terms of re-humanizing Palestinians.

Many of the examples reveal the significance of being connected to a locality in offline terms. This focus is shaped by a collective identity, shared future visions, and imagined community. While the internet also causes fragmentation and diversity (as stated in former chapters), its general political context between 2001 and 2005 was mobilizing towards collective solidarity and political unity. Due to historical timing and consequently the changing push and pull factors shaped by their dynamic evolution, I have argued that the development and trajectories of websites are not static or timeless.

The new developments meant that someone in Lebanon could finally come across a site about his/her original village in Palestine. Localizing Palestine was like a virtual highway through which Palestinian diasporans travelled to places in Palestine, making it possible to connect with people around the world without a visa or passport. Although the experience is virtual and nothing can really make up for the actual experience or practical Right of Return, some internet users talked about it with such emotion it was as if they had literally travelled to Palestine. The online imagined communities juxtapose with everyday offline life. Palestinian websites and email, chatting, and mailing lists are the vehicles that structure this dialectic correlation. Thus, the internet revitalized a 'long distance' nationalism.

This was greatly assisted by the *Arabization* of the internet infrastructure, and scores of websites and initiatives were launched every month. Extreme political circumstances in Palestine since the al-Aqsa Intifada led to websites like *Dying 2 Live* and *I am a Palestinian,* and the efforts of *Solidarity Design* that explicitly appeal to the West. Notwithstanding the growing Palestinian solidarity movements across Europe and the US, the reoccupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the heavy incursions in March and April 2002, the destruction of Jenin refugee camp in the same period, and the collective punishment by closure and curfew over the years determined the intense

internet activity. The groundbreaking developments were confirmed by the many blogs and .ps websites that continued to appear.

Virtual participation analysis needs to be linked to political economic structures and everyday social realities because this approach underwrites and clarifies the access, circulation, evaluation, and relevance of potential ICT technologies. Besides the production of websites and their specifically targeted audiences, another important theme in this chapter concerned the users of Palestinian websites. Palestinian publics are specifically imagined through the production and consumption of these Palestinian websites. A 'behind the scenes' study of producer and consumer participation led to interesting insights in these developments. Those like Mohammed (*Al Bareeq* from Nahr al-Bared camp) who made their own websites spent day and night developing them. By involving friends from his camp, but also online friends in Syria and UAE to help out—the site carried on despite it being attacked by pro-Israeli hackers.

Many studies have analyzed religious motivations and representations in acts of resistance and internet activism. I explained that while religion is an obvious factor in the debate, I tried to go beyond the level of representation and search for the roots of the struggle, a struggle that is often presented in diverse ways but here predominantly represented in a national/anti-colonial fashion. My research took place at a specific political/technological junction in time when online 'religious' representations were only one of the fragments of a larger picture—an interesting finding in itself. However, not long after this 'junction', many Islamist (related) actors appeared online. Conclusively, the Islamist tendencies were not very present online due to the focus on offline/everyday politics, as well as online exclusion by others for (fear) strategic reasons. This explains the relatively low presence of Muslim politics online between 2001 and 2005. I will reflect on the post-2005 changes—mainly the important political/technological shifts that took place that made online presence more relevant and helped avoid exclusion from former online network methods—in Chapter Eight

As stated, the progressive growth of trans-national websites signifies a politicized enterprise because it corresponded with the Palestinian uprising. It therefore also forced a more strategic use in their aim to target Western audiences, including the way they do and do not associate to other online sources. Interviews with webmasters revealed that some do not want to divert attention from their agendas, nor be 'guilty by association'. These bottom-up visions helped to reveal how the political-economic logic of ICT structures shapes the attitudes and face-to-face participation of Palestinian producers and consumers; this contextualized/offline analysis will be the main topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 6: At the Crossroad: Internet Cafes

> How cyberspace will affect us, is not directly inscribed into its technological properties: it rather hinges on the network of socio-symbolic relations (e.g., of power and domination), which always and already over-determine the way cyberspace affects us. - Slavoj Zizek (1998).

6.1 Introduction

More than any other setting, Internet Cafes (ICs)[161] represent the new spaces where the offline and online meet. Internet cafés in general, particularly those operating in extreme situations, capture important aspects of the interlock between virtual and everyday life practices. Internet access overcomes alienation and isolation for people facing colonial occupation or exile. Therefore, Palestinians *inside* (occupied territories) and *outside* (diaspora) are impacted by the internet and ICs. To dispersed Palestinian refugees outside—for whom 'trans-national mobility' is merely a catchy title (Chapter Two), the internet offers (at least) virtual mobility and a 'virtual escape' (Chapter Three) from their particular isolation. For the internally displaced and occupied people in Palestine, internet access overcomes isolation during curfews.[162] In these clearly politicized contexts, ICs lie at the intersection between politics, technology, and society.

In previous chapters I studied the relation between Palestinian online communities and their offline reality. In Chapter Four I analyzed the imagined Palestinian nation and (envisioned) state as mediated through the internet. Through an analysis of Palestinian websites in Chapter Five the online representations of collective identity and virtual imageries were illustrated. This chapter will build on these themes by studying internet practices as they are experienced offline by Palestinian internet users. This chapter is motivated by different questions: How is internet used in everyday Palestinian life—at home, in an internet café, during curfews? In what way does the internet enable the presence of otherwise absent participants in public spheres? How does internet use relate to collective notions of morality? Examining such on-the-ground practices will clarify how the internet is used because little is known about the underlying issues of internet use in everyday Palestinian life. And this will, in return, show how communities (within their social realities) affect the development of technology. Since the Palestinian context is highly politicized (and at times facing extreme challenges), we have to 'be there' (in the Palestinian towns, the refugee camps) to comprehensively examine the Palestinian context. And sometimes

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[161] I use the term internet café because it was the most commonly used during interviews. Some interviewees also used terms like Cyber Café or Net Café, as will be quoted in the references.
[162] For Palestinians "inside" this is also significant in terms of offering an alternative medium to communicate their suffering since the Palestinian narrative is excluded from mainstream media.

this means being literally in the streets during military invasions, as I experienced during fieldwork in Palestine in 2001/2002 when visiting secretly opened ICs.

At the outset of this study I showed that internet users are active both online (chat rooms, email, and cultural or political websites) and offline (meeting people face-to-face after online contact and sitting next to one another in an IC), sometimes creating new social or love relationships. While studying how internet use is practiced in public internet locations, the commercial internet cafés and internet centres of local NGOs turned out to be particularly interesting. This chapter will therefore focus on users/owners of different kinds of internet cafes. One of the larger outcomes of the study of these offline internet spaces is that ICs are *contested spaces*, especially in regards to women's participation. Gender became a striking prism through which to understand the disputed context of public internet spaces. They hark back to first 'coffee houses' known from literature about the (Habermasian) public sphere. My discussion about Internet Cafes in the different Palestinian settings resembles the critical discussions about public spheres in the sense that they are neither neutral nor completely closed.

It is significant to evaluate the social impact of these new online/offline spaces with regards to how they evoke moral or politically charged values; and to which formal/informal set of understanding IC users (and owners) refer to. This analysis will show that public internet spaces are not just *contested*, but that everyday internet utilization also manifests processes of change, reflecting *agency*. Two important examples of this kind of agency will be examined: public internet places that defy curfews by offering their services, and the formation of new friendships and love relationships via the internet. However, the first section will illustrate how ICs pulled Palestinians to the internet, and visa versa. The experiences I encountered in Palestine and Lebanon also led me to situate the different Palestinian settings and deconstruct the different faces of the internet in order to understand the transformation of ICs. The context of the intifada and a community-based perspective will be taken into account.

6.2 Deconstructing *The Internet*

> Sometimes it's funny to hear elderly people ask the kids "Did anyone call
> us on the *Antirnet* today?" – Shaker, Beirut, 2003.

ICs are dynamic spaces; they may transform, expand, or cease to exist due to different social/political/technologic factors. To understand these factors, it helps to demarcate the internet in terms of the sort of instrument and medium it represents. This approach is based on a study of the technological infrastructures at stake, and the way power/capital is implied in the different settings that shape internet use. I discussed the general political-economic context in Chapter Two, but it is also important to question how, in the different contexts, people are attracted to the internet.

At the time, novel advances strongly captured the enthusiasm and imagination of new internet users. Fifteen-year-old Shaker, who enthusiastically commented on these new developments in the above quote, describes this enthusiasm when he wondered if we were experiencing the revolutionary impact of ICT. People's first usage of the internet was mostly explained in relation to school, work, and projects at community centres. The need to stay in touch with new and old friends abroad was another commonly mentioned reason for getting to know the internet. Khuloud, a mother of two teenagers living in a Beirut refugee camp told me that she made an effort to know more about the internet when her friend in the camp was about to return to Canada: "Rebecca took me to the IC a few times to teach me how to use the internet so we could at least stay in touch by email". Similarly, 17-year-old Samah from the same camp uses the net to stay in touch with her family abroad. She sometimes takes her grandmother and mother to the IC to join in her chat sessions with her father or brother.

In Chapter Two I proposed that what we see is a *relative* revolution in the internet impact on Palestinians. I also stated that ICT structures still exhibit an inherent contradiction that comes to the fore when we examine internet politics/usage. While originally designed to assist the army and then introduced to the market as a new product of enormous capitalist profit, the internet had also become a counter-instrument. By understanding this contradiction and moving beyond utopian/dystopian visions of the internet, I called for a dialectic assessment of internet technology. The debate about the internet and the virtual public sphere helps to explain its interrelated opportunities and limitations. This can be conceptualized in several ways. Oldenburg (1999) positions public cafes at the heart of the community's social vitality, similar to how I regard the public internet cafés. Studying changes in urban geography, he shows that cafés represent important public places and argues that they are the "third places". People can gather in these new spaces for the pleasure of good company and lively conversation. Exploring how the intentions of IC owners and practices of IC users intertwine will unveil similarities/differences between the many ICs. It will, in other words, show that ICs are "technological social spaces" (Lægran & Stewart 2003). Moreover, rather than looking for the individual impact of these social spaces, a community approach is more adequate, if not necessary in a context marked by poverty, dense population collectives, and extended family households (in which producers and users are part of the same communities).

Community Based Internet

The positive impact of internet in the Middle East should not be exaggerated for two reasons. Firstly, the absences of ICT infrastructures in some (rural/remote) areas, together with illiteracy, poverty, language barriers, or political violence, are crucial factors. Secondly; internet communication shares important similarities with earlier developments in communication technology. The call for a dialectic approach towards the internet in Chapter One is particularly obvious in this section for it will help to

deconstruct the internet as a technologic instrument *and* investigate its social impact in society. While the grass-roots impact of the internet is a clear novelty, the social impact of the internet in terms of communication/access to information is not completely new. The (emancipating) impacts of earlier communication forms were defined by the availability of the telephone or the growing possibility for non-elite classes and women to enter educational institutes and learning read and write. Apart from this *continuing* evolution of communication technology, it should also be stressed that the internet is a *container* medium. The following account by Daoud Kuttab during an interview in Jordan in December 2003 illustrates the different/simultaneous characteristics of the internet:

> Amman-Net is online since 2000. It is just like any other fully equipped enterprise with reporters, presenters, and researchers. It is not allowed to have private radio in the Arab world. This is its power: a radio station that's doing something completely illegal in a legal way, a private radio using the internet to circumvent the laws. (…) And we are able to reach those without internet through satellite and radio stations in Palestine, which can also be heard in Jordan because of short distance/receiver. Radio stations in Palestine download our programs and broadcast them on FM. Examples are radio Bethlehem 2000, Radio Nablus, and Amwaz Ramallah. (…) The coverage and attention it has in Jordan is special because of its Palestinian population and relation to Palestine. Amman-Net is perhaps not of much interest for those inside Palestine because it is, in fact, a Jordanian local station. Amin-Net and Palestine-News are much more applicable [for a trans-national audience], with daily coverage from inside Palestine. These sites get the largest amount of hits via our site. The Arab press is free about news related to *other* countries, but not their own. Amin-net started in 1996 as one of the first sites in Arabic; it was censorship-free, offering a collection of newspapers and magazines from Arab countries. The language was the key; now it is also in English.

Daoud Kuttab's projects show the prospects of radio and newspapers via the internet and how the internet is distinguished by its multifunctional properties because it includes different media forms. Thus, as a community based instrument, the internet clearly differs from, for example, television vis-à-vis possibilities to produce their own/critical content.

While someone has the possibility to (independently) set-up a homepage or a blog, he or she would not be able to influence the mode of control for radio or television programs. On the other hand, a personal website will not reach the same audience of (mass) TV broadcasting. Although it is not a completely new communication and media form, the internet is a meta-medium (Kircher 2001), offering communication beyond the uni-directional patterns of traditional media.[163] The internet is thus a *multi-layered* technology in terms of content, space, and audience. With a single touch of the keyboard one can find religion as well as pornography, or

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[163] In Hafez, Mass Media and Society in the Middle East, 2001:138.

the combination of different genres at the same time. The internet is profoundly immersed, including different types of communities and interactivity comes in online as well as offline forms: online contact in virtual (private/anonymous) spaces, and face-to-face contact in (public) internet cafes and centres. Interactivity is one of the major components aimed at by Palestinians working in the ICT sector, even more important for people separated by walls, barbwire, or laws. Marwan, a Palestinian web designer who works in Ramallah, elaborates on the necessity for Palestinians to have online interaction:

> We worked hard on www.alnakba.org because many deny our Nakba (1948 exodus). My mother was born in Lod [Tel Aviv] before she had to flee. Now we can find a lot of information about her village and history on this site. But it also became a popular website because of the guest book. Many in the diaspora have no opportunities to talk to each other, so we offer this technique to bridge the gap.

The value of the internet when mobility or physical contact is impossible cannot be overstated. During military curfews or general strikes, the ICs were over-crowded in Palestine. The refugees in the poor camps in Lebanon also told me they enjoyed going to the IC during power cuts because without electricity or television there's not much to do at home. When it is boring at home one can go to an IC. But school and work stimulated the general use of the new internet technologies as well. These socio-political circumstances, in combination with the multilayered/meta-medium characteristics of the internet, have increased IC visitors.

School projects and exam papers more often required access to a PC and the internet. In some cases teachers tell students to do online research and hand in a paper that is typed, printed, and sometimes even to include images. But not all children in the camp can fulfil this requirement, either because their families cannot afford up to 3000 LL (3$) for internet and printing, or because many young refugees did not know how to use Microsoft Office or the internet programs. While spending a day in an IC in Bourj al-Barajna camp, I noticed that an employee was looking for information and images of dolphins on Google. After inquiring about it I learned that she was helping a young costumer. She explained that she sometimes does research for the children because she feels sorry for them, and when time allows she trains them to do it themselves. I focus on this community perspective of the attractive properties of the internet in order to integrate bottom-up information in the general analyses the internet's effects. As argued in Chapter Two, this community perspective is also important when measuring penetration percentages.

I consider the IC the primary place to find out whether the internet is part of a particular larger community. The statistics of ISP subscriptions and private home connections are often used as indicators, but the IC offers an alternative grassroots context and adds an important level to the dominant analyses of internet penetration. This view shows a more complex/broader internet penetration than at first expected, giving a voice to people who often cannot afford internet access. In regards to

internet use from the community level, I recall many 'indirect' users (friends, extended family, and neighbours) using the same computer, or friends gathering in front of one or two computers to chat and surf in an IC. While I watched her chat and email with family members, Samah sat with her mother and grandmother in the IC. These examples of Palestinian communities utilizing the internet in ICs confirm that data on household/individual statistics do not serve as satisfactory measures.

The internet café also presents a more *fluid* understanding of cafes; sometimes the IC is an extension of the house or school. In several ICs the children came to play games in the morning as they had to wait for their school shift.[164] Some children come after school and stay until their siblings or mothers drag them home at night. According to many IC employees I interviewed, some parents actually find the IC convenient during the day: it is like a nursery where the children are entertained and watched over. Such places are usually noisy and indeed seem like a children's centre, but soon I noticed that an informal structure divides the day in an IC according to costumers' age and gender. The IC managers will send the children away around six or seven; then the atmosphere changes because it is time for the youth and adults that have returned from university or work to occupy the place. To understand this specific context and infrastructure of ICs better, I mapped the Palestinian settings in Chapter One. Here I will continue by mapping Palestinian ICs in the different Palestinian (refugee) settings.

Situating Internet Cafes

Although ICs are my focus here, Palestinians did not only connect to cyber space through ICs. There are also those who were able to access virtual communities in other settings. For those who could afford it, there was the alternative of having internet connection at home. Unlike the public atmosphere of cyber cafés and computer centres with their open chat rooms, free websites, and accessible mailing lists, the private spheres of individual home experiences were not accessible for ethnographic research in the same way. Nevertheless, I also interviewed Palestinians who could access the internet from their home setting.

At the time, not many people had home connection; according to interviews with ISPs I estimate the percentage of private/home access in 2001/2002 at somewhere between 3 and 5 per cent.[165] However, those who did access from home told me they specifically preferred to use the internet at home sphere because of privacy (nobody can see what one is viewing) and practicalities (all files are on the pc). Zen from Bethlehem and a student at Birzeit University experienced it as follows:

> I spend most of the time at my boyfriend's now to use the internet. If I
> would apply for telephone connection in my own house, it would only be

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[164] Since the camps are over-populated and the classes are too big, schools have to divide students into morning and afternoon shifts.
[165] See Chapter Two for statistics/analyses of the main penetration rates in different settings.

for the internet. The meaning of place and time changed for me; I am from Bethlehem, not far from Ramallah. I could normally visit my family. But now it's almost impossible with the curfews and closures. If I want to know how they are or if I need to assure them I'm ok, I email them. When they attacked and reoccupied Ramallah, I checked many websites and news sources on the net for information and pictures.

Without disregarding the importance of this specific example, ICs were the most significant ways to enter cyber space in the period 2001-2004 when internet connection at home was rare for reasons related to economy, infrastructure, and politics. Evidently, most people relied on internet cafés for socio-economic reasons, especially in refugee camps.

Tracing the development of ICs in an accurate way is generally problematic, and in Palestine and Palestinian refugee camps even more so. There are a variety of ways to map the internet cafes, like by focusing on audiences (refugees/lower/middleclass) or location (in/out of camp, in/out of Palestine). I will also look at different national settings (Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine), including the dynamics inside these countries (see Figures 9 and 10 for geographic and demographic insights to refugee communities). My earlier visits to Lebanese camps in 2002, and my returns in 2003/4, were eye opening vis-à-vis changing notions about the internet.

People sometimes talked in terms of *conservative* vs. *open* camps; Ein al-Hilwe was perceived as conservative and Shatila or Bourj Barajne in Beirut as more open minded. However, while the Beirut camps did not have internet cafes during my first visits in 2002, Ein al-Hilwe had started experimenting with internet usage. The presence of ICs related to different internal structures and larger power relations that the camps were subjected to. The differences related (partly) to the fact that refugee camps in the South and North of Lebanon were more impacted by the strong position of Hezbollah (South Lebanon) or Syria (North Lebanon); sometimes these camps were like a state-within-a-state. This was not the case in Beirut where the small size and Lebanese government (state power) tended to be more prevalent. Size and location of a camp matters: Bourj Shamali in the South is relatively smaller and more remote than Ein al-Hilwe, thus also more isolated and "closed" in terms of (social) control. Ein al-Hilwe, although also in the South of Lebanon, is much bigger and, more importantly, better connected to the city of Saida. Internet access in refugee camps is linked to easy availability in two ways: it is *inexpensive* and *nearby*.

The differences become bigger when comparing the attitude towards internet camps in the North and South of Lebanon with those in camps in Beirut. In Nahr al-Bared/Tripoli the introduction of the internet was a big issue, in Bourj al-Barajne/Beirut it was hardly so. And while Palestinians from camps in Beirut can walk to an IC in Cola, a busy and lively area, within 15 minutes (and thereby also save 1000-2000 LL for a taxi, equalling one hour for internet), Palestinians in other parts of Lebanon are more dependent on IC's *inside* the camp. The significant distance to Sour's centre from Bourj Shamali, or to Tripoli from Nahr al-Bared, is a particular problem for girls and younger women. We passed military checkpoints on the long

(offside) road from Sour to Bourj Shamali and were finally dropped of on a square in the camp. The group on the square stared at us as we stepped out of the taxi and walked in the direction of the home.

Thinking about a comfortable place to chat or email outside the camp is possible, but it requires planning, freedom of movement, and (thus) support of the family. Studying the process of internet development shows the ways in which different groups of people dealt with challenges. Although there is the possibility to go to an IC inside the camp, the question is if they also offer special women-only hours, or at least if women could feel comfortable there.

Internet familiarity happens in different ways and relates to the local (social/political) state of affairs. The changes between 2002 and 2004 in Nahr Bared were telling. Commercial competition and the prospect of making profit seemed to have more impact than moral frameworks, so while in 2002 a mixed-gender public place was prohibited as *haram* or *'aib* (disgrace), in 2004 mixed internet cafes were already common in many places. Some ICs were competing and offered extra services such as printing and scanning, web-cams, Net2Phone cards, or even a telephone *"Central"* (switchboard system). In fact, these telephone *centrals* were of great importance to normalize the presence of ICs inside the camps (Picture 20).

My introduction to Ein al-Hilwe refugee camp in 2002 was a confrontation with what I consider the *relative* revolutionary impact of the internet. I started a conversation with the owner while I waited for my friend's cousin to pick me up at a local phone shop. He explained how he started his business a few years before. I asked him what he thought of the fact that phoning from Lebanon to Palestine is impossible. As the situation in Palestine since the Intifada had dramatically worsened, the need for contact had probably intensified. He laughed and said, "Then you still don't know how creative Palestinians are"; he pointed at his computer, and said "We use the internet to call Palestine my dear". The low cost availability of telephone connection is a very important asset of the multi-layered internet as I noticed before. I still wasn't sure about it so the guy offered me to try it myself; within ten minutes I was on the phone with a friend in Jerusalem, and then another in Ramallah. My friend on the other side of the line was surprised as he asked twice "are you really in Lebanon? In Ein al-Hilwe?! Please-please send my greetings to the brothers and sisters in the camps". Lebanese law prohibits telephone connection between Lebanon and Palestine (Israel), but normal landlines for other use are also prohibited in Palestinian refugee camps.[166]

In Bourj al-Barajna, Akram understood this as well and invested his money to start a telephone central and IC. Since he already used one phone line for the (telephone) *Central*, he managed to get a second line through a friend outside the camp and also connected to the internet. He first brought his own computer and later added a second one; that is how he started an IC with just two computers. The *central* made a lot of difference to the users. Interesting is the intra-active connection in Bourj al-

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[166] A Lebanese NGO in a Palestinian camp will get special permission.

Barajne (between houses inside the camp). People could connect to each other inside the camp via the main *central* switchboard. According to Akram: "A mother can call her married daughters for long chats, our complete football team is connected so they can plan their trainings via telephone, and people can call each other for less than the cost of mobile phones." Since the calls must go via the central in the IC, employees can also take messages. Another way to offer telephone connection in the IC was to use net2phone cards (10–25 US dollars). With a head phone and a mic, the client can call any local or international number when logged on to the system via the online card-code. This is an impressive phenomenon after five decades without telephone, fax, or other technological ways to communicate between camps.[167] The camps could now make local and international phone calls via the internet, for even lower prices than with official landlines. And importantly, as my own experience showed, it was possible to overcome the political rules of prohibition on communication with Israel/Occupied Territories.

Scanning, webcam, chat, and net phoning, were examples of the useful and practical solutions of ICs and internet use. It was interesting to discover how Sahar at *Sirhaan Net* IC managed to arrange a travel visa to the UAE for one of her clients. Normally it would have cost 30 dollars to send a copy of the ticket by DHL and at least a week to receive a reply; here the process took a few hours. She scanned and emailed the ticket, than waited for the email reply from the host in the UAE who needed a copy of the ticket to obtain an application form. When they received the application form by email, Sahar and her client filled in the form together. They then sent it back by email and it was practically done. I saw letters, application forms, and pictures being scanned and sent off in IC *Al Quds* in Wihdaat camp (Amman). Sometimes it was not even necessary to have an email address because people could also use that of the IC. And IC *Firaaz* in Wihdaat camp also had a fax machine. Such ICs—with faxing, scanning, and sending and receiving email/post, made them look like small local post offices. The multifunctional uses of ICs are important because it also introduces a diverse set of costumers to the internet and makes it a more acceptable place. This also means that new encounters and experiences through internet offer new possibilities; the internet became a valuable asset for the exiled, isolated, and immobile by allowing access to other places/peoples/resources. The outbreak of the Intifada and the occupation shaped the setting and development of ICs in Palestine in other ways.

Intifada Frames the Setting in Palestine

Besides big cities, ICs have been mushrooming in remote areas as well. In the OT, many people who work in Ramallah lived in the outskirts of the city. Some of the ICs in these areas were doing well because of the closures (army blockades preventing

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[167] The introduction of the mobile phone was also a leap forward but the services in the camps are bad and the subscription relatively expensive.

people from leaving and entering their villages and cities), and especially because of the curfews. The demand for computer and internet services secured a certain income for these little ICs because many people had to continue their work after hours on a PC or needed the internet. Still, the Intifada eventually had a devastating impact on the smaller ICs, particularly those situated in the 'line of fire'. Thus, in spite of the success stories, clashes, curfews, and shootings hit the ICT sector as well. Israeli occupation soldiers often moved with their jeeps and tanks through the connecting by-pass roads. Some ICs gave up because they were continuously threatened and none of the losses/damages was ever compensated; when they stopped making any profit they ceased to function.

I asked one of these small ICs why they actually started in the middle of an Intifada, in an area on the military route for the IDF, knowing the uncertain consequences. But the owner's response seemed to confirm that the sieges and reoccupation took many Palestinians by surprise. According to Abu Samer of *A-Sadaqa* IC:

> Our IC started as a joke and became reality, and we did ok in the beginning. We didn't expect the situation to become like this. We don't have any hope or belief in the future left, we don't even know if we will live tomorrow. They killed children playing in the streets, so what about me? … We don't get any compensation from PA or Israel. We won't see a penny. I haven't seen green money [US dollar bills] since the Intifada started. Nobody cares.

The bigger/stronger ICs had a better chance and sometimes profited from the fact that "weaker" ICs had to close. Nevertheless, although they managed to run a successful IC, some eventually gave up as well. The army had either occupied their space (as military posts), or simply bombed it. That is also why the location of an IC is important in this context. Situated in the Lou` Loua building on Manara square, the *Al Carma* IC was occupied by the IDF during the West Bank invasions. In 2002, during the March siege, extreme military violence, meant to crush the uprising, disrupted everyday life. I visited the place right after the invasions and I could either enter through the door or the hole caused by explosives. "It doesn't matter anyway, and I can't offer you a seat either", said Hisham.

Pictures of the IC and its clients were spread all over the floor—like all the other things thrown around by the soldiers—and resonated of happy days. The interview took place in what use to be a large space on the top floor of a building on the main square, with a view of Ramallah. It was a mess, everywhere broken computer equipment and bricks (Picture 14). The garbage and a huge gap in the wall were cynically introduced by Hisham as the "new interior design". Despite the jokes, it seemed that the Intifada, which initially led to *Al Carma's* explosive growth of customers, eventually also caused its destruction by Israeli explosives. It is worth reproducing the interview at length because it provides an important sequence in the history of this IC. In Hisham's words:

During the first siege [February 2002] I was trapped inside the office for one week because nobody was allowed to leave. I didn't want to cause a risk to my costumers so I closed the place, but stayed behind to protect it. Day and night I heard gunfire and explosions. We could see the clashes between soldiers and the resistance on the streets from the roof windows. At the second siege [March/April 2002] they managed to enter the city up to Manara and occupied our building. I was not here. They didn't use the door, they entered through the walls.

They stayed for 23 days... The place was important for them as a military post because it overlooks the city from different angles. But there was no reason for them to do all of this. It seemed they enjoyed it. They threw my PC files and data equipment out of the windows and stole the software I had been developing. They stripped all my computers. When curfew was lifted for a few hours and people went out to buy food, the soldiers threw cans of urine at the people on the street from my window.

When I managed to return after the siege I was shocked. To be honest I felt like a victim of rape. This is simply what I felt: a violation of my personal being and privacy while I was helpless. Everything was done deliberately. They filled the toilets with sand after they defecated and then clogged them. Before they left, they collected all their rubbish and filth and smeared it round the place, even their shit. An American reporter came for an interview but soon asked, "So, does this all make you feel like also becoming a suicide bomber?" I threw her out.

Hisham's direct experiences with the military (re)occupation of the West Bank also made me understand the difference between Gaza and the West Bank. Gaza towns and camps were not invaded by the army and did not endure West Bank types of curfews. This is mainly because IDF soldiers can't operate inside the dense areas of the many camps. Yet, what did determine the survival of the ICs in Gaza at the time was the economic devastation and extreme isolation (see Chapter Three).[168] Therefore, while public internet access/usage increased the process of empowerment and creativity, the context of oppression also led to disempowerment and destruction. These were the "different faces" of the internet. After having studied the internet as an instrument of change and community usage, I will study the transformation of ICs in the different settings. The internal and external differences will be further studied in the next section; I first describe the birth and transformation of ICs and then discuss them as challenging/contested spaces.

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[168] Despite (and because of) the isolation and poverty, the city counted about 150 ICs in 2002.

6.3 Internet Cafés

> Long after the night has descended and the shops are closed, their shopkeepers gone home, and the sizzle of the city turned cold, a few neon lights begin to appear… they are de facto outlets for a sometimes bored and other times repressed youth who now spend hours playing computer games, browsing triple–X-sites, chatting, and discovering the world "out there" through a flat screen interaction with cyber reality. Daily Star[169]

When I was in the West Bank in 1998 for MA fieldwork, internet cafés were clearly an exception; internet users were mainly found at the university. But upon my return merely three years later in 2001, many buildings in the centre of Ramallah and Birzeit hosted internet cafes. One of these is *Future Net*. 27-year-old Ali started this new business with other family members when they returned from the Gulf. The café is situated in the centre of Ramallah, near Manara Square on the central and busy Rukab Street, where many of the clashes erupted. It was one of the most successful ICs in the West Bank. They opened their doors in the summer of 2001, 10 months after the Intifada broke out. Except for the foreigners (international students, journalists, volunteers, and employees at NGOs), the costumers were predominantly students and young professionals from Ramallah or surrounding towns. *Future Net* had 80 computers (of which 17 were used for games only in a separate space), and was even expanding with a coffee shop and internet 'family room'.[170]

ICs had to overcome difficult circumstances in the Palestinian Territories during the Intifada. While I waited in the IC for a planned interview, soldiers entered the street shooting percussion grenades (sound bombs) and tear gas. As suddenly as the soldiers invaded the streets, there was chaos in the IC. Clients were calmed down and asked to leave the IC before a sudden curfew was imposed and we would be trapped in the building, as had happened before with such incidents. It was a strange experience; just before the clashes, I had been impatient and bored waiting to start the interview. I stood by the windows of the IC and watched the soldiers as they came nearer and nearer to our building. Clashes on Manara Square turned into a cat & mouse of soldiers chasing after youth. The soldiers were criss-crossing in their jeeps while firing tear gas and aiming with rubber (steel coated) bullets. The streets were full of people doing their shopping and children coming from school. Mothers grabbed their children and ran off. This was the first time I saw the soldiers coming so close in the middle of the city; I was almost paralyzed while looking from the windows on the second floor, seeing how young guys tried to escape by running into alleys or hiding in buildings and shops. One part of me wanted to join everybody and run away, it just seemed the only thing that made sense. Another part of me was so appalled and wanted to join the people that were throwing stones at the jeeps.

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[169] *Lebanese young men seem seduced by the internet café* Daily Star, Garine Tcholakian, Jan. 2004.
[170] The family room refers to a space for (married) couples, or where parents with children could come to and feel comfortable.

I managed to interview the manager some time later and of course we talked about what had happened the day I was waiting to meet him for an interview. Ali shared his ideas of what happened during those moments:

> When curfew is lifted, this place is packed, people check the news or send emails about what happened and how they experienced it, sometimes to assure their family/friends elsewhere. People generally chat or email about what they endured with the soldiers and tanks rolling through their streets, or clashes between the youth and the army…like on that day when you came and the soldiers entered again. They were mainly provoking. People protested and threw tomatoes and stones at them. Everybody started to run and panicked because the soldiers were driving fast with their jeeps. Often people get injured or killed by their bullets in similar incidents. So shops were closing immediately and we also had to urge people to leave. Many people were still in the middle of their internet activities so they were angry, but we had no choice and asked them to stop.

Even with the devastated economy and dangerous circumstances like these, *Future Net* was a big success. Foreigners and journalists often used the place to write and sent reports because the speed and services were good, and the IC was located at the centre of the 'actions'. Journalists were often found in the ICs during the sieges and clashes. One of them was an Italian who, tragically, became well-known as the first foreign journalist to be killed in the Intifada.[171] Ali recalled: "The day before he was killed he was here all evening, until we closed. We all knew him as a nice guy."

It became clear that Palestinian settings are not the same. The social impact of the new public internet cafes on Palestinian communities is studied in the different Palestinian diasporic settings. Palestinian returnees played a crucial role 'outside' as well. Median, one of those Palestinian entrepreneurs in Jordan recalls how he started:

> It was a great means of communication with where you came from; many of us are spread around the world. I had brothers and sisters in five different places in the world. The phone was horribly bad, and very expensive. I experienced discrimination as a Palestinian wherever I was; in Kuwait they use to call us 'Humousy'…we would always hear 'education is your only weapon'.

Median returned to Jordan after the Gulf War because most of the Palestinians in Kuwait had a Jordanian passport. He described how long lines of people waited for an available computer in his IC. The regional developments and Jordan's relation with Israel affected internet usage in Jordan. With the post 9/11 escalations in the Middle East, this combination meant that Palestinian returnees, US/British army personnel, Arab businessmen, human right activists, and deported activists from Palestine were all in Amman. This amalgam of people boosted the internet use in ICs even more. Median said: "Iraqi refugees or Palestinian *hajjiyyat*

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[171] Rafaelle Cirello was killed on 13/3/2002 near Manara Square, by Israeli snipers.

[older ladies] would also come without knowing what internet and computers actually are … so people who wouldn't have used it otherwise now do." In March/April 2002, when the conflict in Palestine was extremely escalated, the message board in the IC entrance was also used for political mobilization. However, announcements such as 'all Palestinian women meet outside American embassy' would sometimes be taken away: "That started worrying me; we knew the *mokhabarat* [secret police] did it", Median said.

Figure 9: Geography and Demography of fieldwork sites West Bank and Gaza

FIELDWORK SITE I

WEST BANK	
name of the camp	number of refugees
Aqabat jabr	6,264
Ein el-Sultan	1,828
Shu'fat	10,717
● **Am'ari**	**10,377**
Kalandia	10,759
Deir Ammar	2,335
● **Jalazone**	**10,966**
Fawwar	7,912
Arroub	10,246
● **Dheisheh**	**12,804**
Aida	4,715
Beit Jibrin	2,054
Far'a	7,540
Camp No.1	6,683
Askar	15,591
Balata	22,855
Tulkam	17,981
Nur Shams	8,998
Jenin	15,854
GAZA	
name of the camp	number of refugees
● **Jabalia**	**106,846**
Rafah	97,412
Beach	80,567
Nuseriat	58,727
● **Khan Younis**	**61,539**
Bureij	29,805
Maghazi	23,161
Deir el-Balah	20,215

Figure 10: Geography and Demography of fieldwork sites Jordan and Lebanon

FIELDWORK SITE II
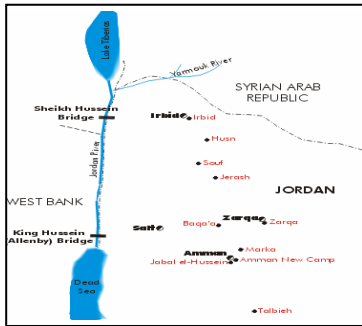
JORDAN	
name of the camp	number of refugees
● **Baq'a**	**90,515**
● **Amman New Camp**	**50,609**
Marka	44,198
Jaba el-Hussein	29,520
● **Irbid**	**24,758**
Husn	21,441
Zarqa	18,335
Souf	19,429
Jerash	23,034
Talbieh	6,107

FIELDWORK SITE III

LEBONAN	
name of the camp	number of refugees
Mar Elieas	616
● **Burj el-Barajneh**	**15,718**
Dbayeh	4,025
● **Shatila**	**8,370**
● **Ein el-Hilweh**	**45,967**
Mieh Mieh	4,569
El-Buss	9,508
Rashidieh	29,361
● **Burj el-Shemali**	**19,074**
● **Nahr el-Bared**	**31,303**
Beddawi	15,947
Wavel	7,668
Dikwaneh & Nabatieh (destroyed camps)	16,518

As for the initial/*trial and error* phase such as Median experienced, the Jordanian development of internet cafes saw different phases. Several studies even claimed that at one point Jordan had a world record of the highest number of ICs in one street—located at Shafaik Street in Irbid across Yarmouk University counting 130 ICs. At the same time the mushrooming ICs were not regulated because there was no government policy. At the end of 2000, the Communication Organizing Authority issued a resolution to regulate ICs, requiring, for example, that entrepreneurs apply for a special license to open an IC. The IC owners would also have to register names of users and produce a monthly record of the browsed websites when this was asked for. The ICs were expected to install censorship programs and official regulations also stipulated that the internet computers be in an open space as opposed to the more private set-ups.[172] According to IC owners I interviewed, if the managers do not abide by these rules, undercover officers may visit an IC they find suspicious. The government later loosened these measures to encourage financial interest in the ICT sector.

Ultimately, it was the costumers and their reasons for coming that crucially determined an ICs success. I wish to go beyond the IC as a mere internet access point, and question what else happens in these places in everyday life. Aside from the technical availability of ICT infrastructures, the value and meanings ascribed to this medium also makes ICs relevant for study. After having established the different social/political Palestinian settings of this research, I now want to take a closer look at the different (infrastructural) possibilities of local IC initiators. Several transformations can be discerned: from a basic and mere *technical* offer to the IC as a *cool* space, and from a male dominated space to a mixed social setting.

Transformation of Internet Cafes

Despite of war, isolation, and lack of economic resources, ICs were still being set up within the available infrastructure. As one of the IC owners in Beirut said to me: "In the beginning the costumers used to wait outside the IC for a free spot, it was a new thing, especially because of the Intifada there was a huge incentive for people to come. The first thing many would ask when they came was, "Can I chat with Palestine?"

As I indicated before, everyone did not immediately embrace the internet. IC al-*Jaleel* was the only provider in Ein Hilwe camp in 2001/2. Its owner was also the only one who could offer internet distribution in homes. Our discussion on whether or not to allocate private internet connection was important in different ways. He told me that he encouraged people to use the internet because of its importance for political and professional empowerment. Although it was especially tempting to sell more internet connections, he initially showed restraint. This was related to the freedom of using it at home. According to al-*Jaleel's* owner:

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[172] Initiative for an Open Arab Internet (2006).

> I think we have to be careful because individual use of internet at home can be harmful. The internet has some negative characteristics and people might get seduced to certain of these elements. … We don't want to limit people's ideas or freedom, but sometimes we have to be careful and give some guidance.

When I met him again two years later and asked about the 'dilemmas' that he use to have, he was less heavy-hearted about the issue. As he did not maintain his monopoly of internet distribution because other ICs soon opened and even started offering private internet connection to homes, the question of what he thought became irrelevant. One of the reasons for these developments related to communication technology becoming more accessible. In the first phase internet access was only available via telephone lines, but later also through a cable/broadband connection, ADSL, and in some cases even satellite connection.

It was a confusing task to trace the way different ICs connected because internet connection infrastructures were illegal in the camp. There are different ways to obtain internet access and a 'friend of a friend', or a relative with a Lebanese ID would usually have to apply for a telephone/cable license. The internet connection (via telephone or cable) could then enter the camp from 'this friend's' home, just outside the camp. The wireless infrastructure requires costly equipment for refugee standards. A simple receiver costs 75-150 US Dollars. After connection is completed through a licensed ISP, anyone can illegally reconnect the connection and re-sell the connection to another IC. Nevertheless, it was an insecure method because it was always under threat of disconnected by Lebanese authorities when they discovered the illegal tapping from outside the camp. If the outside provider is also an illegal subscriber, which often happens, the authorities will disconnect him and thereby any other sub-subscriber. When the internet connection is tapped from a legal owner, it usually is not a problem.

Sometimes I passed an IC in Beirut camps several times without noticing it because it was a very small space, usually part of a house. The reason is that camps are overpopulated and construction is prohibited to Palestinians. The two ICs I studied in Shatila camp, *Scorpio Net* and *Shatila* Net, also offered a view from within with regards to how the young refugee entrepreneurs were motivated. The young men I interviewed in Shatila enthusiastically started their collective undertaking with a small amount of capital. They invested in the minimum costs of a phone line, a few computers, and a space that could function as the IC. Some of them already experimented with internet and computers at school. Nehad, one of the young guys I got to know, helped with almost all technical work in both ICs. In fact, most of the initial setup, connections, promotion, etc. was done by people that are often not officially trained or educated in the field. The owner of *Shatila Net* did not know much about computers or ICT so he involved friends and cousins to set it up with him and at first it was very primitive. Nehad built the computers from different old parts that he could get through his work. For *Scorpio Net* it was similar. In the words of 21-year-old Rafiq:

I am actually a carpenter. There were no Cyber cafés in the camp and my father came with this idea. My cousins helped me because they had some experience and one even studied computer science. We used the ground floor of our house; first I had to make some modifications - door, tiles etc. When I first opened I only had games, I tried to get a phone line but I couldn't so I looked for someone outside the camp to give me a wireless connection. After two months the authorities found out and cut it, then I finally found someone with a legal line who could give me a connection. The authorities can't cut the line inside the camp IC because they have no control in our camps.

With the increase of internet connections, more cables were running through the camp (Picture 18). Each cable is connected to other cables, and a system of tapping forms a web of cables between the buildings. Some people get fed up and cut the lines that obstruct their power supply. Sometimes the local camp authorities cut them when safety becomes an issue. Since Shatila camp is one of the most densely populated camps it cannot absorb the many cable distributions. This structurally results in an average of 4 power cuts a day.[173] Alternatively, a good generator might last for 10 hours, but costs $1500, and a UPS box (Uninterrupted Power Supply) like *Inner Space* has in Bourj al-Barajna is also possible, but these options are affordable by only a few.

The two ICs I researched in Bourj al-Barajne camp in Beirut had different connection systems: *Sirhaan Net* used cable, and *Inner Space* telephone connection. Both ICs suffered from the usual power cuts, but were still better equipped because they had UPS and could generate up to 6 extra hours of power (Picture 17). Eventually, Akram, the owner, asks his costumers to go home in order to save the power. Sometimes they make exceptions for foreigners (journalists, researchers, or volunteers) that live in the camp. He explained, "The *Ajaneb* (foreigners) usually do work on the computer that benefits the camp. But if a Palestinian is working on an essay she would also be allowed to stay, and if the foreigner was just playing or chatting she would eventually be asked to leave as well."

Personal motives, in combination with new commercial prospects were often the reason why many ICs mushroomed. ICs that had extra capital could develop their IC and survive; but the smaller ICs, the ones that illegally tapped from cable connections, did not. Similar to the development of ICs in Palestine, some closed and some became video/game shops that are mostly visited by 7-12 year old boys. *Inner Space* began in 2000 as one of the first ICs in a Lebanese refugee camp; the start of his new business coincided with the outbreak of the Intifada. Political motives played an important role in speeding up the process of internet access in Bourj Barajne. Politics was a key factor for the initiators, as well as for the many new users; the hunger for information increased the turnout.

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[173] Power supply in Shatila was originally settled for 1000 KW for maximum 1000 families, but now the camp hosts 4500 houses and shops.

Key events in the Middle East, such as the Intifada and war against Iraq, compelled people to the internet. During fieldwork in Lebanon, news of Saddam Hussain's arrest created a new wave of political anxiety. Not only television programs gave full coverage -pictures, features, stories and conspiracies travelled back and forth on the internet too. People in the camp ICs were verifying the news, downloading pictures of Saddam Hussain being arrested and handcuffed, and discussed with each other what they read/saw.

In the South Lebanese camp Bourj al-Shamali, the three ICs depended on one internet provider, the Fatah affiliated *Al Karame* youth centre. *Karame* also provided internet to Rashidiye camp where the PLO Head Quarters and main Fatah offices are located. There was only one place in Bourj al-Shamali that offered internet access independent from *Karame*, the local NGO that hosted the aforementioned Across Borders Project. As more ICs opened business generally decreased, but they still made a difference, especially when taking into account the differences between the diasporic Palestinian settings. Class issues were, for example, present in terms of how the ICs transformed/survived.

In Jordan *Books@Café* (*Books*) saw several transformations. They went from mainly selling books to being the best IC to being a trendy coffee shop. Unlike many ICs I visited and discussed before, the place represented an urban hang-out space where boys and girls mixed. It could have been a Starbucks coffee shop. There was also more money to spend, as the price of one hour of internet was high: 2 Jordanian Dinar (more than 3 US Dollar), more than double the cost of ordinary Amman ICs and triple the cost of refugee camp ICs. This IC was clearly the hang out of Jordanian and Palestinian middleclass/elites. Median, the initiator of *Books*, was inspired by the ICs in the US where he worked before travelling back to Jordan. As the first one to open an IC in Amman, setting up *Books* was complicated. Since there was no 'bureaucratic wording' for ICs it was difficult to get a license. During an interview in 2003 he said:

> We labelled the place a "cultural centre" and had to be creative with the ministry of trade. The policy was partly 'go with the flow'. We were hot and flaunted by the media as the first IC in Jordan or even ME. (…)

Books was exemplary of an upper-middle class setting; it was a place where gays, alternatives, *argila*-smoking youth, and foreigners felt comfortable. *Books* didn't monitor its clients and the internet room, in a separate area of the café, provided more privacy. Walking around the different parts of this multifunctional internet café/coffee shop in Amman one constantly hears Arab-American accents. Alcohol is served, and the 'bar-style' interior creates a certain 'exclusive' atmosphere.

In 2003, a year after the first visits in 2002, it was the main coffee shop that attracted people, because while most people already had internet at home. And again a year later, in 2004, I saw many costumers bring their laptops because the place offered wireless connection, so the on and offline chatting could continue with a Latté (for

those who could afford the laptop and the Latté). The transformation of ICs is therefore also determined by the different audiences and their type of participation.

Besides interviewing initiators of ICs, I also talked with internet users about their (first) internet use in the IC. I heard different motives and experiences. Nuhad from Shatila camp in Beirut recalls how she started using the net: "Because everybody was talking about it I went to see the IC and what they were doing. I asked others to help me and started to chat as well, I really liked it." Safa' from Bourj al-Barajne camp heard about and experimented with the internet in order to contact her much missed family and friends from Canada:

> I would mostly email with my brother in Bourj al-Barajne or sister in Holland, I share everything with them. The best experience was when I went to the concert of [famous singer] Fadil Shaker. The concert finished at four in the morning, I managed to meet the singer and take pictures. I waited in the streets until the photo-lab opened and when I developed the pictures I went straight to the IC to scan and send them to every single person I knew!

Safa' knew that her chances to enter the IC and use the internet were related to the meaning of an IC in Canada and Lebanon at the time. And she told me that it was difficult in Bourj al-Barajna. But even between Bourj al-Barajne in Beirut and other camps in Lebanon there were differences. This makes it all the more clear that the IC is not a neutral public space. The presence of women in public space is often contested in Arab societies; consequently, women are also more subject to family/community control in smaller societies and less present in public places than men.

The exposure to new ideas and contacts with the outside world that the internet brings about is also relevant to potential change in ideas about gender and women's presence in new public spaces. The transformation of ICs should therefore also be understood in terms of how it hosts different groups of society. Contesting the implicit rules in ICs is a way to (re)gain access to public spaces. This reminded me of Median's first experiences when he opened *Books* and when he told me: "It was also used against me. Besides already being targetted for my own personality, I supposedly promoted sexuality….we had to fight for it." Thus internet access and participation sometimes needs to be challenged and negotiated; peoples' agency impacts these dynamic developments in different ways and according to different contexts.

Internet Café's as Contested Spaces

> Only a few young girls go to an IC because many feel uncomfortable. Sometimes men open porno sites, this is really very embarrassing. And somehow men think they can more easily get the girls who go to the IC".
>
> – Women's Union coordinator, al-Bekaa camp, Jordan, 2002.

The IC location and its interior, such as how the computer tables are set up, may encourage personal contact or offer anonymity. An extra lounge space in Ramallah's *Al Carma,* the separated computer 'islands' in *Chat Net*, the mirrors behind the screens in Ai al-Hilwe's *Al Jaleel* IC, the drinks & food in *Future Net*, music… all contributed to a sense of comfort or interactivity. While offering direct available (online) sources, the IC is also a physical meeting point.

This comfort was prevalent in several camp ICs; in one of these ICs boys and girls were surfing the internet for stories about the contestants of Arab Star Academy and showed their findings to each other or talked about what they were seeing on the PC screens. In another IC I saw a similar dynamic when youth were watching websites about Palestinian resistance fighters, the images of clashes with Israeli soldiers or pictures of glorified *shuhada'* [martyrs] seemed to have a special impact. Someone would, for example, say to the person at the next computer, "that is a cool picture, can you forward it to my email address too?" And yet in other ICs there were so-called 'computer islands': three computers on separate tables facing one another, giving the users their privacy and secrecy. Looking at the regular visitors and observing the different audiences, I could see that ICs were contributing to broadening the availability of public spaces. Sometimes that meant just changing the atmosphere and meeting new people (or reading the news in another environment) was important in the West Bank of 2002.

There are differences between an IC in a big/city (camp) and other (periphery) locations, as outlined in the previous section. Different kinds of people using the internet also assumes different forms of participation and experiences. The diversity in users of ICs is perhaps best pictured by the experiences in *Future Net*. As Ali illustrated during one of our interviews in 2002:

> We have different types of customers, some more exceptional than others, like that young guy. He looks like some Taliban sheikh. He doesn't email or surf on ordinary sites, but is just interested in Osama Bin Laden and Islamic websites. Today he came with a new CD-ROM about Chechnya and brought 5 people with him, all looking like him… Some people are strange, an older man who is for sure married and a father comes here to chat for hours with girls.

Although Ali is interested in what his costumers do and keeps an eye on 'proper' behaviour, the IC still provides a sense of anonymity/secrecy. The IC can thus also be a meeting point for political groups looking for ideological motivation through specific sites or software as his 'Taliban' example shows.

Access to these mixed public places was clearly related to class and gender divisions, but mainly the division between men and women. At the time, in many cases, men dominated the ICs. I was told that this is why the university districts of Gaza had two ICs for women only. During fieldwork in 2002, Sabri Saidam, Palestinian representative of ISOC in Gaza, explained:

> Gaza is probably one of the most conservative places in Palestine. Internet

could be considered taboo at some stage, and Palestinian society is still a male dominated society. People in villages and deprived communities don't have confidence to send their daughters, but often also their sons, to internet cafés.

Saidam suggests that the IC offered different ways in which IC spaces could function. Possibilities to leave the camp or house and visit ICs depends on the specific girl and her surroundings, but also on the nature and reputation of the IC in question. Local values and rules are echoed in the wider structure of internet (café) access in a community. The fact that many ICs succeeded in establishing a positive image suggests that some ICs aimed at hosting a mixed and friendly place and stayed in good terms with parents, while other IC managers don't care or consider the policy of costumers only in relation to financial matters. The latter may contribute to the negative perceptions about ICs or limited female access.

I talked about this issue with young women in Lebanon's Nahr Bared camp in 2003 during a group interview. Our open conversations resulted in funny and sad stories about the double standard, and their secret internet escapades. The following stories could have been true for other ICs in Gaza or Jordan camps as well:

Due to the morals of our society the girl doesn't have a chance to use the internet as she pleases because the men are exploiting the situation by sticking like glue on their chairs not making any space or time for a girl to use the internet in the IC.

Female costumers in ICs were not common in Palestinian camps, in fact young women faced many constraints and in some settings their presence was an exception. In several camps there were also young (unmarried) women who did not enjoy going to the IC in the camp and preferred to visit an IC outside the camp, usually when they already had to be in town for school, work, or other obligations. Some told their families about their IC visits, others didn't. Waleed, who runs an IC in Bourj Shamali camp, summarized the reasons in the following simple way: "The main problem is me. I am a 23 year old guy and the people around me here are also all men."

Despite this, many community workers or camp leaders I spoke with did not agree with the way women were treated. In Bourj Shamali Lebanon, PLO representative Abu Basel said: "The person who is afraid that his daughter will be influenced by the internet might just as well lock her in a room… it is not acceptable to ban using the internet or going to an internet café." Regardless of the importance of these statements made during interviews, the protection of girls by setting up ways for them to participate were more effective; theoretical analysis is not the same as providing practical alternatives.

Accessibility for women became an important issue when Palestinian NGOs in the Nahr al-Bared and Bourj al-Shamali camps had set-up internet centres as part of community projects. In addition, the number of conservative political-religious groups increased, especially among marginalized communities in the camps. Small sectarian groups had been causing problems in the camps. This had an impact on community projects involving men and women. NGO workers told me they were attacked

because of their mixed activities. For Baha (director of Beit Atfal Sumoud centre in Ein al-Hilwe), activities for women and youth that use to be acceptable, now constantly have to be negotiated and defended. Baha: "I can and I even want to resist the Lebanese and Israeli oppressors, but I can't accept this social oppression on us by the radicals inside the camp. For the first time in my life I feel like I want to leave the camp." A Palestinian activist in Ein al-Hilwe explained why the internet projects also related to power structures inside the camp: "Sometimes even the smallest group can make the loudest noise". With the rise of Islamist movements and a further deterioration of the general political-economic conditions in Lebanon, groups emerged (such as Usbat al-Ansar, Fath al-Islam, or Jama'at al-Nour) with even more sectarian views. They don't have the numerical power, but it is their manifested hard-line attitude that makes all the difference. Salah from Ajial Centre told me during the interview:

> We tried to open an internet project and then these so called 'representatives of god' came to threaten us. They are against mixed places and said that people will enter sex sites. These groups are a worrying phenomena. When my brother refused to remove posters of Che Guevara and George Habbash in his little centre, they tried to burn his place.

This situation was later substantiated by the news that militants detonated a bomb in an IC in Ein al-Hilwe.[174] The intersection between social issues and public space motivated me to look more into gender related issues and how they changed.

Parents and older brothers would more often allow girls and young women to go to places where smoking or access to porn sites was banned, or where separate spaces for men and women were offered. *Inner Space* in Bourj al-Barajne for example, created a more 'women friendly' space; it was considered a comfortable place and many girls and women trusted the manager. A young woman worked in the IC, and Akram also explained that: "As male employees we have a rule not to flirt, not too obviously at least [laughs], with female costumers. We certainly don't allow boys to bother the girls; they can talk to the girls but only if she wants"… "We don't want to loose our girls coming to the IC just because some guys want to watch these sites. Everybody should be able to use it". This example shows that women had better access to public ICs when they were 'protected'.

For the initiators of ABP it was a positive factor that the centres were co-educational and not excluding anyone according to gender; democracy and social change were part of the general inspirations when setting up this project. From the way the project operated in Gaza, I understood that such demands could not be

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[174] Fathi Mahmoud, Pumping an internet café in Al-Helwa camp, Al-Ahram Newspaper, 30 December 2004, pp. 8. In fact, similar incidents took place where militants referred to the IC as a place of corruption and immoral acts. See: Unidentified gunmen pump cyber café in Jabaliya, Palestine Press, http://www.palpress.ps/arabic/index.php?maa=ReadStory&ChannelID=51462 as visited on 10 October 2006 by Open Arab Internet researchers, see http://openarab.net/en/ for more on the subject.

imposed. For example, although the trainings were mixed, free access to internet was also offered at separate times or separate rooms for men and women. This was necessary for mobilizing female participation, and it did increase their presence. Sometime it needed one-on-one encouragement by staff members with parents to allow their daughters to join the project. The women's union in al-Bekaa camp introduced a 'women only' internet project and gave special internet training to girls to increase their attendance.

Another way to generate a more diverse public was to have female instructors and coordinators. They functioned as role models and promoted the project, at least within their own immediate family or friends. One of the encouraging factors that changed peoples' perception about the internet was the fact that school projects started to require the internet. Education offered a general justification to enter ICs and for accessing the internet for women/girls. From the many stories in Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon, I learned that internet use in ICs related to study or educational improvement (i.e. as oppose to just hanging around for pleasure). The girls were more supported. Going to an IC is easier for schoolgirls and for singles, but for married women it was sometimes considered a "waste of time because of her family and home responsibilities."

The IC had become a 'safe' public place for young women because it is not really a café (with reference to a 'bar') and therefore more acceptable. Nevertheless, several girls and women had to deal with discrimination, even if their families did not pose a problem. Hanane from Nahr al-Bared camp said: "My brother who now lives outside encouraged me to use the internet in order to stay in touch, but the guys here are stupid." At our group interview in Nahr al-Bared, the young women expressed their frustration. "Men are the ones with best access, they are privileged to use the internet. …We are fighting on all fronts because we are poor, refugees, and female." Saida, a friend of Hanane added: "You will not be spared if you fall victim to the *awlad al-shawari'* (street children)." A girl going to an IC was considered to be *'aib* and the gossip associated with it discouraged them even more. As Saida continued the discussion, Ibtisam, Hanane, and Fatima joined in:

> But lets not beautify things that are ugly and speak frankly: we are living in a really closed and strict society. Our traditions don't make any sense, they are weird. I mean, where does this bullshit come from, this is oppression. Ibtisam: of course we must be frank about these conservative mentalities and the oppression. But we must also explain why this is so. You must understand the conditions, especially the remote location of our camp. Being far away and not linked to a city is important for how they think. Many people of our camp also came from rural areas in Palestine, it is still part of their way of life. Hanane: They stick so much to their old and almost ancient traditions and habits. Fatima: But the consequences are directly and always for the women, so we can't accept it."

On the question what would happen if one if them decided to rebel and go to an IC, Fatima said: "For me it would be impossible, I'm not going to expose myself

to them. My parents don't have a problem if we go to university or to our work, or even to use the internet. But our reputation is still very important; the IC is just considered a 'bad place'." The special shifts for men and women didn't work in certain ICs because the young men did not respect the rules. As Rasha said earlier, they stuck to their seats.

That's why, at the time in Nahr al-Bared, many girls were only able to go the NGO that started special internet centres. They also went outside the camp to an IC in Tripoli, or to specifically women-only places or separated spaces. As Saida said: "I'd rather go to Tripoli: no eyes, no ears." But as described in early sections, a trip from the city to-and-from the camp is quite a mission. Sanaa, one of the costumers in the IC in Ein al-Hilwe referred to before, told me that the separate women's section in *Al Jaleel* makes her feel comfortable. The curtains that separate the two parts give here a feeling of security, but also a cover/legitimacy that made it more acceptable.

The objection to girls using the net is mostly the fear that they will establish contacts with men and eventually meet them offline as well. Parents sometimes told me that their daughters might "go to an IC and meet with boys". There was also suspicion that when the girl goes out on a blind date with an online contact she might be seduced during the follow-up face-to-face meeting. Although some of the fears might represent a general sense of loosing control over women, some objections are relevant. Several interviews with young men revealed that some of them pretend to be a girl to get in touch with girls, even sending them a fake picture. The guys then compete with others in getting and sharing information and details. Unsurprisingly, many of these guys have negative feelings towards their sisters using the net. The way I found out about this game was when I asked Mahmoud how many email accounts he has:

> One is the Hotmail, I use it with the name 'shy girl' and pretend to be a girl on msn. Just to make fun of friends, and make other guys on msn fall in love with me. Once I made a date with a guy. We chatted 3 o 4 days before I told him 'I'm in love with you and want to date you' and such things. So he said ok, 'where can we meet?' I made a date at the Arab University, I saw him waiting for me there! Sometimes they try to check by asking for a picture. But I have pictures my computer, I took them from a website with pictures of Lebanese girls, or got them from other girls on msn.

But the positive virtues of the internet: education, news from *dakhil* (inside/Palestine), contacting family abroad, were becoming legitimate reasons for girls to visit the IC.

The above shows that in many cases, the IC was a *contested* public space, specifically in terms of gender. Class distinctions are also a marker of the different ICs as I explained. Places where the middle and upper class youths gather, such as *Books* in Amman, seem to have other 'norms' and expectations. With these dynamics, new questions come to the fore regarding the social fabric of this new public sphere. The questions are similar to the effect original 'coffee houses' generated in terms of access

and participation in public spheres. The next section shows social differences related to ICs as contested places. The discussions will confirm that ICs are neither neutral nor exclusivist and resemble debates about the *public sphere, coffee house,* and *cafe.* As argued in the introduction, I understand Palestinian ICs in a similar way as Oldenburg (1999) looks at cafes as spaces in between: a 'third place', beyond home or work. I see the IC places both as public *and* private spheres.

6.4 The "Coffee House" Effect

> If it was possible to make a report about the human feelings that were present in this place, you would read a lot of sad stories, happy stories, love affairs, new friendships…In other words, many different human feelings developed, and perhaps ended here as well.
>
> – Hisham, *Al Carma* IC, Ramallah 2002.

Many types of internet users crossed each other during my visits to the different ICs. The words in the opening quote are a powerful summary of the impact of ICs in Palestine. Hisham's account resonates of the impression I had in other ICs as well. The internet café became an offline meeting place where people gathered, exchanged, and discussed news, waited, drank coffee or had a snack, almost like any coffee house.

   Of course, the ramshackle internet cafés in Palestinian camps, crowded with young energetic Palestinians, is a far cry from Habermas's 19th century *coffee house* packed with the bourgeoisie. But in unexpected ways, they served similar functions. While cyberspace is the new online meeting space, the internet café became a new offline place. ICs are public spaces that may or may not fuse the different functions it potentially offers, i.e. work and leisure: ICs are more than physical spaces with tables and internet-wired PCs. Oldenburg's (1999) framework exhibits the same meanings that coloured Habermas's ideal type of public sphere. His model may help clarify how internet cafes overlap with, or differ from, traditional community cafes. Such spheres and places are not neutral and their impact is not one-dimensional. Habermas (and to a certain extent also Olderburg) reflects on important debates that account to the social relevance (and actual accessibility) of these public places. The configuring processes of ICs many encourage certain practices and discourage others. Lægran & Stewart (2003) speak of 'technosocial spaces' (:359). Their research on ICs in Scotland and Norway builds on theories inspired by the social shaping of technology and sees ICs as spaces where technology is translated into local contexts.

   In several contexts I showed how ICs host different kinds of participants, which ascribe different meanings, alternatives, and opportunities to the internet. The above discussion about gender disparities signifies that internet spaces are not neutral/accessible to all. The public internet cafes are not liberal spaces free from class/gender/race bias: the IC is a place that needs *to be negotiated*. ICs and internet access have all kinds of expectations and ideas linked to them. These different faces of the internet can be seen as good for one and bad for the other. The everyday rules and

behaviours are attached to the different interpretations, and these formal and informal rules are often infused by moral ideas and ideologies.

The Good, the Bad, the Ugly (…and more Internet definitions)

> For Kuwaitis and other Muslims alike [sic] one of the problems of cyberspace is that it interrupts traditional systems for awarding authority and authenticity to public discourse. This concern, however, has not slowed Muslim uses of cyberspace. Some have even gone as far as to argue that cyberspace has created a form of Muslim renaissance (Wheeler 2003:12).

ICs develop/transform in various contexts and ways. I see internet spaces creating new social spaces *for* and *by* different publics. ICs provide leisure and may even strengthen social contact and face-to-face communication outside the home. People enjoy this type of alternative space with the sociability it offers, somehow like traditional coffee houses, as the café setting in Oldenburg's sense. These dynamics can be conceptualized by recalling the notion of the "coffee house" from the old *public sphere* concept in the new setting of the internet café.

ICs differ from public access points such as libraries and pubs, although as Lægran & Stewart (2003) pointed out, "Some cafes may fail to create a 'café' environment, while some community centres or libraries may succeed" (:307). Patterns of use and significance of access go beyond the technical question; ICs became the most common internet access points for Palestinian communities (especially refugees). An important factor that increased the popularity of ICs was the value of the internet as entertainment. Instead of waiting for their school shift or having nowhere to play in the overcrowded camps, bored children became experts in computer games. Beside the games there were also 'real' battles. One of the IC's in Im-Sharayet, a little town located between Ramallah and Jerusalem where my friend Rami lived, said the following about the use of his IC, *Asadaqa*: 'When they enter Israeli or American chat rooms it's like a war in the IC. They are so involved, they curse and fight on the internet…It comes from deep inside, it is what they really feel because they can do nothing else." Thus for a relatively 'closed' (and displaced/isolated) community, going to an internet café became a new kind of entertainment or escape (Chapter Three).

Internet users thus appreciated the social benefits of ICs and NGO-related internet centres. Visitors of these internet places often engage with each other's activities as they surf for websites related to news about sport, music, Palestinian prisoners and martyrs and they sometimes discuss the content. They are politically minded, but at the same time they engage in leisure activities when they play the latest combat games, listen to music, or surf for websites with trendy fashion or cars.

Wheeler's (2003) comment about the 'renaissance' in the above opening quote is appealing because it also assumes social change. Social change includes new

spaces to address the struggles related to ICs. Samah explained to me why the IC is more than what it may seem at first sight:

> My favourite place is here with Akram [Inner Space IC in Bourj Barajne camp]. I can ask him anything and it feels like home. The guys don't bother us because we all know each other. Sometimes I come and I find most of my friends, we sit and talk a bit, and than take a computer to check the internet.

Samah clarifies why ICs can be understood as *technosocial* spaces; the IC is embedded in different private/personal/offline ways. Samah from Bourj al-Barajne in Beirut does not face problems going to an IC and even used the net before it was introduced in the camp. One of the ICs in the suburb of Beirut used to be a meeting point of friends for many of the girls I met. In Bourj al-Barajne one can practically choose whether to stay in the camp, or go out to an IC a few blocks away. Several people who have this choice told me that for printing or only to check/send a specific mail they just stay inside, but for working, meeting friends, sending long or private emails, they sometimes prefer to go to a quiet or comfortable IC outside the camp.

The encounters in the ICs also led to the usual vibes and eye contact between boys and girls. 16-year-old Hiba from Bourj Barajne told me that a guy asked which IC she usually goes to. "He came to meet me while I was there trying to open an email account for my aunt. We didn't talk too much, but we did exchange emails. When we met online he said he loves me, I explained I just wanted to be friends." It is not commonly accepted that dates meet in an IC, especially if it is too obvious. Sahar, manager of *Sirhaan Net,* told me clearly irritated, "Once this couple entered my IC because they agreed to meet there. I refused for my shops' reputation. I told them 'you meet outside, and if you want to use the internet you are welcome.'" She recalled another incident: a mother came with her daughter to the IC because they heard about a woman who married after meeting someone on the internet. "She sat beside her daughter who explained what the man was saying in the chat room. The mother than practically dictated to her what to reply. She wanted her daughter to find a husband. This is very degrading, I mean, I think it's wrong that people do this". But I also knew that this could only take place in an IC where women would feel comfortable in the first place. During one of my visits to *Sirhaan Net* the place was very lively and people were doing all sorts of things. This was clearly related to the fact that Sahar and her sister, two women, were running the IC and tried hard to make it pleasant. One of the costumers was online with his girlfriend. He asked Sahar how to answer some of the 'girl stuff' that his girlfriend was asking him about on the MSN. She jokingly replied "You have to treasure your sweetheart or she will dump you my dear." Sahar told me: "Sometimes it's like a family gathering. At Ramadan all our costumers, old and new, come and stay with us. Once we made *iftar* (breaking of the fast) for the close costumers, and during Eid we had a small party."

Everyday politics and informal relations like the IC interior or personality of the employees can make a difference. What struck me in *Inner Space,* also in the Beirut

camp Bourj al-Barajna, was the smooth coexistence referred to before: young women, macho boys, a parent, worker, a Hadj… and they did not interfere with each other. The Hadj told me that he likes the IC, and later added that the girls shouldn't chat so much with boys (which meant he knew what they were doing), but he said it was not his business. A young client sitting a few computers away from the Hadj, told me that she sometimes goes out of the camp in order to have a private chat with a man because she doesn't want to risk someone finding out that she might meet him. Paintings and other decorations have an impact on the atmosphere of an internet space as well. It can make a place more youthful, political, serious, or romantic.

In *Inner Space* in Bourj Barajne Intifada posters and informative lists with a selection of popular websites and chat rooms were found on the walls. In Nahr al-Bared evocative murals of Palestine brightened the Sumoud internet centre. At this ABP internet centre they sometimes had the lights off, only the blue computer screens provided a dim light. And when the coordinator smoked his *argila* (water pipe), passing it to others in the room, the intimate ambiance was complete.

The way ICs dealt with social realities was crucial for their eventual acceptance. Meanwhile, local organizations started internet centres. They created practical opportunities for women and girls to participate in a public space. Sanaa, a divorced mother in Ein al-Hilwe who learned to use the internet via the computer and internet courses offered by the local community organizations, made many friends online and told me she feels happy because people accept me for who I am" and that "it was the first time I met people that were different from me". The inevitable has happened as more ICs opened their doors, even where ICs caused many debates. In 2004 I conducted interviews in at least three ICs in Ein al-Hilwe. I even found a mixed IC though people were still saying this was nonexistent in Ein al-Hilwe.

Moreover, the fact that in *Al Jaleel* all computers had mirrors on the wall that face the screens (for the owner to see what was being viewed online) and the separated space for female costumers might be considered an example of (religiously motivated) restriction, it was not always experienced as such. Several girls/women specifically enjoyed *Al Jaleel* because it gave them extra privacy, and the men do not see what they write. The curtain was not a sign of oppression but gave them liberation as it offered the legitimacy to go to the public IC. However, the new impacts of the IC, and the virtual window opened to the public, in some places caused exceptionally tense situations.

In Nahr Bared the internet was even labelled *haram* (prohibited by Islam) for a while. Yazan was also in Nahr al-Bared at the time the stories about internet cafes grew out of proportion. I wanted to know how it was for him to use the net - his father did not allow him initially: "I used to tell my father to come with me and see with his own eyes. But he would refuse and say that the people said it was 'bad'. I said everyone uses the net according to his own aims, bad or good. At the end I convinced him to let me go". The internet created so many disputes in this camp that it was discussed during Friday prayers. When it became a concern and people started talking about it inside and outside the mosques, serious debates started.

I asked Sheikh Ahmed in Nahr al-Bared, and Sheikh Mounir Maqda (Al Aqsa party) in Ein al-Hilwe, about women and ICs. In their opinion, ICs are acceptable when used with respect to religion. Mounir Maqda told me that his advice for both young men *and* women is to:

> Learn about the internet because it's a means to resist and a tool for education… When Salah al-Din (Saladin) liberated Bait al-Maqdis (Jerusalem) he used pigeons to exchange information with his army leaders because it was the fastest means of communication. Now the internet technology is.

The Sheikh outlined to me how he views the internet:

> Islam is a religion that appreciates knowledge and science. Many people have ignored or missed this point and instead depict Islam as anti-progressive. But the first aya (verse) of the Qur'an "Iqra'!" (read!) is clear evidence of the value of knowledge in Islam. The internet can be considered as part of science and generates knowledge. Allah says "Qul hal yastawi al-lathina ya'lamuna wa al-lathina la ya'lamun?" [Are those who know and those who do not know equal?], the answer is 'Only those who are educated will know.'

After he was confronted with what internet cafes meant and offered, the Sheikh views changed from discouragement, to testing the internet himself, and eventually sharing his positive internet experiences in the Mosque. If you *can't beat it, join it*, seemed the philosophy. As confirmed by the interview with Sheikh Ahmed, it is problematic to essentialize the way a community regards the internet.

According to Sheikh Ahmad, the notions about internet were predominated by the fear that: "in the beginning people thought it was nothing more than a screen that displays pornography. The young men stormed the ICs even when many didn't have the slightest idea about computers; they saw it as a magic screen." The mosque countered the negative use of the internet in the camp, instructions on proper behaviour and ethical internet use were aired during Friday sermon. It was clear from the stories that the disputes were fused by a sense of morality. Eventually, the internet (café) was, *faith-a-compli,* a fact. Nevertheless, acceptance was related to certain rules referring to frameworks about what were considered 'the good' and 'the bad' aspects of the internet.

Rules of Engagement: Morality, Ethics, and the Internet

> We contacted the IC owners and invited them for a meeting. Sometimes we visited their IC to explain how they could work better. One of the suggestions was to make a list of the best educational and religious websites and how to communicate with our brothers and sisters in Palestine. It took a few months. Most cooperated but in a few cases they said they are free and will allow whoever wants to use it in his way.
>
> – Sheikh Ahmad, Nahr al-Bared, 2003.

After the involvement of the Sheikh to convince ICs to behave according to Islamic values, the situation improved in Nahr al-Bared. Sheikh Ahmad also went to Najde Women's Centre and approved their (mixed) ABP internet centre. He was satisfied that all screens In Najda were visible to the coordinators. At Friday prayer, some time later, the Sheikh referred to Najde as a 'safe' and 'clean' place. The general condition seemed to come down to the notion of a "clean" IC, one that should preferably not be mixed or should offer separate spaces for men and women. But in reality, these rules were not strictly applied.

It is important to understand that ICs and internet centres are set-up by people with different intentions and social or material abilities. This is also reflected in the kind of clientele it attracts and by catering to a specific style of behaviour and engagement. Islam is an important reference point for many Palestinians. During fieldwork in Jabalia camp in Gaza in 2002, it was clear that men dominated the ICs. Yet I met one woman in a local IC in the camp. As a lawyer working in the camp and using the IC for her work she was one of the forerunners to open the road for other women to claim their seat in the IC, often legitimizing their presence by referring to the equality of women in the Quran. This kind of agency was also apparent by those student and community activists struggling for a women-only IC or space.

As characteristic of any religion: the implications can be both negative and positive; references to Islam were used to either encourage or discourage internet use and female participation in ICs. The variable status vis-à-vis the (mixed) internet places corresponds to the differences exhibited in attitudes and practices. Ahmed and Maqda explicitly encouraged internet use and both used religious or political legitimacies to emphasize their position. When I asked how internet use is affected by social restrictions like gender bias, Sheikh Ahmad said: "The Prophet's words are clear when he said 'seeking knowledge is a duty which every Muslim must fulfil. Muslim means both male and female." And he continued:

> The good side of the internet is clear, but it also harms. Many dangers are present and no one can avoid them. Also in politics there are sites that propagate certain ideas influenced by globalization and the New World Order. They are a threat to our children's mentality and mind, especially because our religion and country is targeted.

What they confirm is that the image and "status" of the IC is also important; how others refer to it and how people talk about it is sometimes more important than the actual practice itself. To understand the complex dynamics, I needed to scratch the surface and uncover the internal rules and social structures that lie underneath.

Officially, thick curtains separate women from men, and mirrors behind the computers allows the manager of *Al Jaleel* IC to glance at the screens (Picture 22). But when I spent time in *Al Jaleel*, two groups of boys and girls assembled at one computer. I asked if they were allowed to do that and they told me with a smile that they were doing a school project as a group, so they really had to sit together. Several times the owner would leave the place to run errands, leaving a young assistant to watch the place. In practice this meant that customers could open any website. Thus

the 'image' and perception of a place generates its status: and the *potential* control works as a self-censor to prevent 'misbehaviour'.

This hypothetic control is also employed with regards to internet content. Some ICs try to place firewalls to block porn sites, others 'clean' (check) each pc after a costumer leaves; sometimes it happens that a costumer is asked not to open a certain site when he returns. One of the providers who had an internet centre and also connects people at home, sometimes even monitors his clients. Beside his own internet centre in his youth organization *Al Karame*, he checks on others as well. I asked about his motivations:

> After getting the monitoring equipment it became easy for me. I don't monitor the ICs that connect through us because they should make their own control. But subscribers at home, yeah, sometimes I monitor them. … Before my clients even knew that they were being watched the majority were surfing porno sites. I intervene, I basically warn the user twice before I disconnect him. I just tell him so that he knows I know, to make him feel ashamed and think twice before doing it again. I am mostly surprised by those clients who call themselves "devoted Muslims".

The new (internet) interactions at ICs are important in Palestinian society where overt public expressions of love or sexuality are discouraged. With ICs, the internet was a vehicle for visualizing the dream of a territorial Palestinian space, and for dreaming about many more exciting new possibilities. The internet 'glue' got stronger when grass-roots interactivity and participation increased. Like the different rules of engagements in everyday life showed, this did not only alter online communication, but also their everyday articulations. In the next section I discuss the articulations/practices in Palestinian ICs that contributed to processes of change.

6.5 Beyond 'Contested': Everyday Manifestations of Agency

> [T]he protection of the screen gives individuals the opportunity to overcome inhibitions and fears without violating the principles and values with which they were raised. …. Communication face-to-face is often not relaxing given the strict rules of modesty in public engagement, online communication flows more freely, giving the user an unprecedented opportunity to learn about other opinions, at the same time that they develop their own (Wheeler 2006:13-14).

A poster on the wall of a small 4-by-4 meter space of the IC drew my attention; the image evoked a sense excitement and rebellion. On a yellow-red background with the Golden Dome and al-Aqsa' mosque in the back, the poster represented images of clashes and injured Palestinian teenagers being carried away. The collage of images included the shape of a boy swinging his catapult; the picture seemed to be taken just before the stone shot out of the catapult. Turning away from the poster, I saw screensavers of Palestinian images/maps and pictures of Che Guevara. The moving images, as well as the poster commemorating the Intifada in Bourj al-Barajna camp in

2004 were significant in different ways. Firstly, they show that the interior images promote a sense of mobilization or national unity, and secondly that they are also spaces of contestation and rebellion. The feelings and the imagination that the poster evoked reminded me of Palestine two years earlier. I started telling Akram, the manager of the place, about the 'curfew café'.

In Ramallah in 2002 the curfew and Israeli military actions had stripped Palestinian cities of their customary liveliness. Rukab Street once overflowed with life—cars and wagons choked its intersections and pedestrians milled around its shops and stalls—but was now eerily silent. Rami (my friend and, on that day, my guide) and I cautiously had to avoid IDF patrols. We had, in fact, a calm walk through Rukab Street. A few people scattered toward the dim lights of shops and homes, while a single car sped past the closed storefronts with its motor echoing through the nearly empty roads. Many walls were pocked with bullet scars and posters of martyrs, and scrawled with graffiti. These scenes symbolized the re-occupation of Palestinian towns that began in 2001/2002.

Because the street was effectively empty, some details (normally hidden by the cars, stalls, and people), came to the fore. One image on the pavement was particularly striking: that of an Israeli tank crossed out and circled in red. I later discovered that international activists spray-painted this image as a sign of protest. The graffiti seemed to shout out a clear, though simple, message, and we both smiled at the thought of how seriously Israeli soldiers would take it. In the past five years, hundreds of tanks and bulldozers have ploughed through Palestinian towns and villages, levelling homes, buildings, schools, and gardens—leaving only ruin in their wake, not bothered by international law or grass-roots protest. This reality became common for many Palestinians in the occupied territories. Our journey, through what seemed an (occupied) labyrinth, was necessary because it was my first visit to a secretly opened internet café in downtown Ramallah. The curfews that crippled Ramallah, proved how important the offline reality was for access to the internet. I therefore wish to investigate the use and impact of the internet in these offline Palestinian settings more directly in terms of *agency*.

A few hours before the labyrinthine tour through the streets of downtown Ramallah with Rami, I had been interviewing the people and observing the place. Like the rest in the people in the IC, I was actually breaking the IDF rules. On a curfew day no one was to be on the street, this collective punishment was maintained as a common practice for at least two years in many West Bank cities. Usually the curfew lasted either the whole day (24 hours) or from 17.00-05.00.[175] It was 19.00 and I had been in the IC since 17.00. After walking around the room, talking with some of the costumers, and checking my own email, I returned to my seat. I was near the desk where Mahmoud, the young manager, sat with a few other friends. Not far from the desk sat one of the new customers who enthusiastically said to his friends: "Look, she

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[175] Israeli jeeps drive through neighbourhoods and announce the curfew. Sometimes we don't know if it will be curfew and then we'd here the soldiers in their speakers shouting the announcement that a military curfew is imposed from.

said 'I'm fine, and you?' and she asks me where I live, what do I reply!?" Mahmoud was smoking a joint with his friends in the space behind the desk. The guys went in and out but the smell gave them away. When I made a joke about it, Mahmoud replied by asking me if I wanted to join. I jokingly answered "No, not during work". Mahmoud would normally not have allowed it, but it was not a normal work situation: it was *mani' tajawwul* (curfew). The thought of Israeli jeeps patrolling the streets at the same time made everything feel unreal.

The offline impact of the internet is also determined by (social-cultural) power-relations and the complex experiences of being a Palestinian *outside*, alienated from Palestine. Exiled Palestinians are in constant mediation between their host-state denial to basic equal rights and citizenship, and Israel's refusal to the Right of Return. Consequently, displaced Palestinians deal with a complicated reality because they are not in their country, though sometimes just a stone-throw away from what was previously their land. The new online encounters reconnected a part of the fragmented community because exiled Palestinians can visit their people and places. After describing the remarkable *Curfew Cafes*, I will study the new possibilities of friendship and romance. This chapter will thus end by illustrating virtual relationships between Palestinians *inside* and *outside*.

Curfew Cafes

> During curfew, people here act like a family, there is more solidarity, people offer each other cigarettes, ask and give advice, etc. Normally we don't allow alcohol in the IC, but during curfew we sometimes let people have a drink. It's what we also feel in the neighbourhood or supermarket these days, in the Intifada people help each other to survive and continue.
>
> – Mahmoud, Chat Net

Computer screens illuminated the curfew café, giving the space an even cosier atmosphere. I was sitting comfortably with the cup of tea that Mahmoud had offered me and was trying to take notes, but my attention was drawn to the guy who had been informing his friends about his chat exchange. He later told me that he works in a restaurant kitchen and had never used the internet before. He only came to the internet café because it was near to the restaurant; there was nothing else one could do during curfew anyway. He was smiling and had a friendly face, but from time to time it switched to a grimace. I could imagine a balloon above his head with the text "What the hell am I suppose to do now?" This expression was further confirmed by his tensed body: face down, shoulders bowed, two fingers waiting anxiously above the keyboard, his eyes searching for the right letter, then hitting the keys as he writes his reply to the girl online.

This all took some time, but after he finished a sentence he would gaze at the screen awaiting a sign. When he finally received feedback he was noticeably delighted. He said to his friends again: "She said she is fine, but now she asks me where I live". A few friends cracked some jokes; one guy said "So now you are

chatting too huh, well well well…" But he couldn't be bothered by the teasing and was thrilled by this new experience. "What more did she tell you, yallah [come one], tell us", the guys continued. He didn't answer because he was concentrated and repeating the same ritual: face down, shoulders bowed, two fingers pointing at keyboard, his eyes screening for the right letter, and tak! More guys were surrounding him now, patting him on the shoulders, trying to help him and asked what she had replied. The guys teasingly said that he just lost his "*internet virginity*" with this first chat encounter, but they were supportive and amicable. After a while everyone went back to their own computers and continued surfing the net, playing games, writing emails, or chatting too.

This semi-public setting represents many levels of analysis when we discuss a setting under occupation; and thus the IC cannot be divorced from its material/political location. These impacts on the setting determined the access, experience, quality, participation, atmosphere, style and/or duration of internet use in that particular space. Palestinian public sphere, infrastructure, capital and power, and Palestinian social values crystallize in a grass-roots view. The IC under occupation is a unique culmination and Mahmouds IC continued to provide connectivity despite the curfew, that's why we all called it the *curfew café*. So when laughter burst out when the guys were teasing their friend, Mahmoud urged "Shht not so load, the soldiers will hear us when they pass by." Turning around to the table next to him, he said: "leave the guy alone" while nodding at the new chat user. But the young man didn't seem bothered anyway, and continued his online adventures as if it were the best thing he had done that day, curfew or no curfew.

My trip in Ramallah with Rami during this curfew night confronted me with an important element of the public character of ICs in Palestine. *Chat Net*, located in the centre of Ramallah, was the first (and for a while the only public place) that rebelled against curfew and didn't close its doors to customers while the city seemed like a ghost town. Most people in *Chat Net* probably would have preferred to be in a restaurant, have a drink somewhere, or walk on the streets. Of course, many clients are frequent internet users and perhaps would have been there anyway because at the time many people did not have internet connection at home. Mahmoud wasn't really sure about this experiment, but his friends and regular customers almost forced him:

> It started when I was cleaning and organizing my things to close the IC before curfew started at 17.00. Costumers came to check if we were staying open, some people were going out even during curfew and wanted to use the internet. We decided to try and open after 18.00. Now we almost earn the same as on a normal day. I don't find curfews boring; I'm using my time being with people and making my money. They didn't manage to stop my life like they did with many others who are locked up.[176]

Customers enjoyed it and were angry when Mahmoud had to close for maintenance. The IC was used for entertainment as well as for work. Many that were

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[176] Interview 09-09-2002 Ramallah

living near the building, and some willing to take more risks, came to finish work. One of the costumers I spoke with was working for a CD production company and was busy surfing the net for pictures of celebrities for the CD covers, and he downloaded the titles of the songs. Another person actually had internet at home but decided to come to the curfew café because: "I live very nearby and it is very lonely at home, here we meet and talk to each other. On normal days I only work, but during curfew a visit to the IC is my main activity". Many others clearly came to Chat Net to overcome the boredom and loneliness typical of curfew days. During the day, before curfew was imposed, I had also spent time in the place; then it was much more crowded, with loud music and noise. Now it was quiet and almost dark.

16-year-old Ali was chatting in a Palestinian chat forum, meeting his friends or introducing himself to new people online. They talked about personal things, and how the political situation affected them: "Even though I am here and trying to continue my usual things, I feel under control. It is the true meaning of being 'occupied', it hurts me deeply to know that there are foreign soldiers in my city at this moment". They also exchanged the latest news about other West Bank cities where some of their common friends lived. He told me he used the internet much more during curfew than at other times. Eid from al-Bireh was 14 years old and younger than the other boys. He told me enthusiastically, "I mainly like to chat to anyone so that I can improve my English; I want to become a singer you know". He and his two friends had a rock band called 'The Golden Three'. He was viewing all kinds of music sites and was checking the latest celebrity news. He also collected information and ideas for the website they planned to make. I asked him whether he wasn't scared coming all the way from al-Bireh (suburb of Ramallah), which was relatively far: "I think Israelis want us to feel scared all the time. Today I managed. When there is a very tough curfew with jeeps in our own streets I don't come, I then ask my neighbour who has internet if I can use it."

Some of the teenagers in the IC came from surrounding districts by special 'curfew taxis'.[177] Most customers enter *Chat Net* just before curfew hour (17.00), so then they have to find a way back home late at night. The risks are also part of the reason why there were no female clients the night I was there, Mahmoud explains:

> During curfew there will be less girls or children because of the danger. The reason is mainly the danger. If soldiers catch a boy they will hit him or arrest, if not shoot him. But if they catch a girl this causes more problems for her and her reputation and maybe they might do other things as well. Only girls that live very nearby come to *Chat Net* sometimes.

Hence the curfew café filled a gap, but could not always overcome the dangers caused by IDF operations. Though special measures were taken, like turning the sound and light off, the IC was not completely safe:

> We keep the lights down so that the Tanks won't see us. I'm taking extra

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[177] These taxis were taking great risks because army snipers have killed several people that were outside during curfews.

risks but the costumers are not afraid; they already broke their fear by coming here. I actually used to be the scared one. Once a tank passed by in this street and it felt like the building was going to collapse, everything was shaking. I jumped to switch everything off but the customers started to laugh at me, saying 'look, the boss is scared!'

Unlike Eid and his other teenage friends from al-Bireh, many of the clients live or work in the centre of Ramallah near the IC. Apart from the usual customers and friends of Mahmoud, some of the new clients are restaurant workers forced to spend the night in their workplace in the centre. Most of them were new internet users who had just learned to email and use chat programs. I talked with a few of the local workers and one of them was Ahmed, who became curious: "I am a new user, I work a lot, so I never have time for the internet. Now I started to understand the basics, but I want to learn more." He saw friends and colleagues enjoy their time advantageously during the useless curfew days, and wanted to try this out as well.

During Curfew, *Chat Net* was much more relaxed, cheerful, and helpful compared to my visits during the normal opening hours. There was definitely a different atmosphere in the place. When I left with Rami around 22.00, people were still enjoying their time, on the emails and chat, working, or surfing the news sites. One of the clients was walking in his *jilbab* (traditional home dress), apparently feeling at home, and Mahmoud was preparing some snacks for his friends; this public place had the private atmosphere of a home. During meetings in the ICs and their online communication, people were experimenting with new personal encounters. With their agency they managed to deal with some of the challenges while under occupation or in exile, and enjoyed new friendships or the pleasures of flirting and love affairs.

New Challenges: Romance and Friendship

Some girls do not like chatting with me, many people view chatting as something between men and women. Also some men don't continue when they know I am 33 and have a child, I don't like to hide this. Some politely say 'sorry, you are not the person I prefer to chat with'. But other people don't have a problem, especially my contacts in Palestine became good friends. When we meet online they ask about my daughter because they know my story. I feel so happy when people accept me on the net, even though there will be those who don't accept me as a divorced mother. I do have friends in the camp, but my experiences with the online friends are different, it's like meeting new people, with a different mentality, it opened a new world for me.

– Safa, Ein al-Hilwe camp, Lebanon, 2004.

The following from Wired magazine is most probably the case for upper-class individuals who can afford to jump on a train or plane or wave their North American or EU passports in a way that looks as easy as surfing to another website: "Pretty soon we will stop distinguishing between online and off, dating site or virtual

community. The internet has become as ordinary as any church group, running club, or singles hangout when it comes to meeting a special someone or two. … We've finally accepted that it's the connection, not the connectivity that counts." [178] Stories about *virtual love*, sexuality, or friendships rarely touch on *real* problems like inaccessibility or immobility. Generally, people cannot just take a plane and meet their future friend, spouse, or lover once they find them online. The experiences of young Palestinians are certainly a world apart.

Nevertheless, internet communication does open up new social configurations by allowing access across class/borders. Safa's experiences in the opening quote confirm how gender and social norms are part of the new public internet spaces. According to Wheeler (2003), the "most magnetic quality of internet which drives Kuwaiti youth to the net is the way in which it enables to transgress gender lines … interrupting traditional social rituals and giving young people new autonomy on how they run their lives". The positive and negative effects of internet have impact on everyday relationships and face-to-face manifestations because they are partly conditioned by them. The debate about "right" and "wrong" values of internet is often reduced to issues of sexuality/love. Friendships through internet are important too; Chatting is not just a 'waste of time' or meaningless entertainment.

Online (romance) adventures enriched people's social networks and often increased the self-confidence of the people I talked with. Sanaa was a divorced woman whose husband took away her children and left her with no income and a load of guilt and shame. She told me how she 'left the harsh life in a camp in Lebanon, to live in a cave in Canada', i.e. to be trapped/isolated (again) and a dependent wife. She could not continue that life with her husband, and returned to the camp alone. Feeling depressed and socially excluded made the internet an even more comforting space for her to escape from time to time. Sanaa shows how a unique experience via the internet can change a persons' life. The only time that she was not in her miserable routine was with her new online friends that accepted her for who she is. Once she even met a man whom she had a very open relation with in a chat room. She explained to me how she was a different person when she started using the internet:

> I found lots of people, and even met some here in Lebanon. I was specifically interested in men from the Gulf. One guy from the Gulf was very rich and so nice with me. When I knew what it means to talk to people about my feelings I started doing it to help myself. I just wanted to have good times for a change. But then something great happened: One day we were on the internet and the next day he was sitting next to me when he visited Beirut on a business trip. We talked about everything. He only stayed six days so we met a few times in the afternoons. Before he left he encouraged me to go back to school. He also said I should fix my teeth [laughs] and to send him the dentist bill whatever it cost. I didn't do that of course, but it was very kind.

> I didn't tell this to anyone, the consequences are different because I am a

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[178] "Beyond the Dating Database" by Regina Lynn. Wired, March 11 2005

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divorced woman. No one would believe that I met a guy from the Gulf in a hotel that was my friend online. No one would believe I didn't have sex because I am not a virgin anymore to prove it. But you know those times were so exciting; the best days of my life. I stopped looking on the internet for a husband, it doesn't work that way, it was my aim but I didn't believe in it anymore.

The IC was at a one minute walking distance from her house, a friend of the family was working there, and her brother and sister also went there, so it was an *accessible space* for Sana'. When she said that she "stopped looking for a husband" online, she acknowledged that this was one of her aims. But these motivations were usually part of a blend of experiments. The friendships, romantic experiences, and new networks manifest the impact of internet on everyday lives especially in times of need. It also for the first time offered romance between the diaspora and Palestine. 'Love' is one of the most exciting topics about the influence of internet use. A search for intimacy and love may also be evidence of loneliness and alienation in everyday life. Maryam from Shatila, who already had two internet boyfriends before, could not keep the excitement about her escapades to herself. Maryam:

> When I told my neighbour about meeting guys online she became so curious and also started to chat with guys. Now she is also making boyfriends and meeting them. It adds something to your life, it allows escaping the daily life of school and home, you can meet new people and go out of the camp. Maybe even by being in the IC you can meet new people; most of the employees are guys anyway. Its nice, normally we can't do new things in the camps.

> Once my mother went to the IC to get my sister because it was getting late. My sis was chatting and mom sat beside her till she finished. She was chatting with a guy but my mom didn't understand the romantic exchange in English!

Online love and dating means one is not dependent on family or other matchmakers. It also means that people do not have to always meet in secret to talk anymore. In fact, as Safa' had said in the opening, sometimes women didn't even want to chat with each other much. Hala from Bourj al-Barajne explains some of her encounters with other Arab women online: "I don't even get a chance to talk: she's gone before I even finished the sentence "hi, I'm a woman from...!". There is not one general attitude during these online escapades, however, some of the women I interviewed in Lebanon told me they sometimes felt disappointed: "When people ask where I'm from and I say Lebanon they are very interested, but once I say I'm originally Palestinian and that I want to know about the situation in Palestine, they loose interest." What struck me were the special online romances between Palestinians in the diaspora, and particularly between some *inside* and *outside* Palestine.

Most people in Lebanon and Jordan agreed that being in love with someone in Palestine tops all else. One of the clear examples of a (idealized) view about

Palestinian men in Palestine, and direct contact through internet, was from 25-year-old Palestinian Zainab from Beirut:

> Ahmed was one of the *tanzim* (resistance faction of Fatah) activists during the siege of Bethlehem. They showed it on television, they were forced to eat grass because they were trapped inside the church for weeks. When I got his email through a friend I convinced myself to write him. I took some time before I decided to send it because I was afraid it was not the same person, or maybe the one answering me was an Israeli. Two days later I received a short reply, he said "Yeah, I am the one whom the sons of bitches have kicked out from his own country". It was a short email but I recognized the Palestinian dialect in his phonetic script, I was sure he was a Palestinian. We corresponded a couple of times, I emailed him a lot, even though he didn't answer back all the time. But he asked me to send him as much as possible because he really appreciated it. I think he was lonely. He asked me about other Palestinians in Lebanon, and if people were still committed to the cause, and what we were doing in our daily lives. He didn't write much about himself but as long as he was writing back, it was fine for me.

Several times that we met she mentioned Ahmed, during our talks I sensed that Zainab was in love with him. But she was also puzzled because she realized he might not feel the same. But the internet cannot transgress all boundaries although Zainab in Lebanon loves Ahmed in the West Bank, alas it is almost sure they will not meet.

Internet and love provided rich anecdotes as I heard numerous stories from many people. When I met Dali and we discussed this, her experiences resembled a science fiction tale. Her experiences were particularly sad because of the meaning of being in love as a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon with someone in Palestine:

> You feel like drifting away as if no one is around you. The only aim is to talk with him. But I want to see him, something is missing. Then I feel I shouldn't make the mistake of talking about love, just politics and Palestine because it's impossible for us to meet anyway. It's hard.

Feeling broken-hearted by an internet lover is complicated in a situation of exile. And sometimes contact suddenly stops for weeks or longer with their cyber lovers or friends in Palestine. Several girls told me how in some cases they later found out that their friend was dead, injured, or arrested. Evidently, with such contacts also came the hardships, but there were also many refugees who were experimenting with online lovers in more accessible contexts.

Some of my female contacts in Lebanon met face-to-face with their online date from Beirut, sometimes from a refugee camp as well. During our group meetings they shared their excitement; "It was so exciting, I met X at Verdun, but my god, he was so ugly!". This response is similar to the reaction in Elia Sulaiman's film when the girl eventually leaves Palestine on a journey to find her internet love. When she finally found him, she hurried off; he was nothing like what she had been fantasizing about. Interestingly, Mahmoud from Shatila said that sometimes online dating is nicer than offline: "I chatted with this girl for 3 or 4 months. It was nice but when we met, everything changed."

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The online relation can also be the result of previous offline meetings. The summer is usually a very exciting and happy time, with lots of gatherings and parties. Many Palestinians living outside visit their families in Jordan or Lebanon, and many foreign volunteers come to work in the camps. Even more important are the International Youth camps with groups of Arabs from different countries, including from Palestine. Every year in Lebanon, summer loves come about as the result of the youth camps or family visits. Without the internet, the new friendships and relationships would have been difficult to maintain. This is even more problematic when communications between the people involves a different language. People invent alternative ways to bypass linguistic problems during the predominantly English/text based communication of the internet. Writing in phonetic style or using numerical symbols to express specific Arabic tones and letters became common practices. Internet usage is also a flexible process; internet is itself a tool to overcome linguistic barriers. Samir from Bourj Barajne met his girlfriend during the summer when she came with her parents from Denmark to visit the family. Like Samir, people created the *lou'at al internet*, (internet language, Picture 24), to manage the trans-lingual communication. Samir, who is normally a construction worker, did so with his girlfriend to overcome their language barriers. He writes spoken and slang words, using numbers to accentuate specific Arabic letters.[179]

Many young Palestinians were using the internet to migrate; surfing to find a job or scholarship to study outside, although it is nearly impossible for most people to receive a scholarship in the West—especially after 9/11. As Ali from *Future Net* in Ramallah explained, many of his clients are students. Beside their studies, emailing, and chatting many also surf to find information about grants and how to obtain a visa. Internet love is sometimes also employed for the purpose of leaving the country. The following is an extract of a private group interview with young men from Shatila camp regarding their ideas about leaving the country, which actually evolved from discussing the internet:

> A. The conditions here are hard. If she is abroad, like in Sweden or Denmark, etc. she could help me leave, I can later get a European citizenship– One now thinks with his mind not his heart (…) I could love a girl here for four or five years and then couldn't marry her in the end because I am [financially] unable, so its worthless. I experienced that, just imagine–after loving someone for five or six years, at the end someone else comes who has money and takes her, just like that. For everyone, whether educated or not, the most important thing is to leave now. M.D. Yes, some guys pretend that there is romance, love, and everything. But some actually really do – A. No, ok there may be a romance even if it's only via the net, but not true love. How could someone love me via the net? It's not love, it's self-interest. I pretended that I loved my internet girlfriend, at the end when I asked her hand, her family humiliated me with

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[179] Using numerals to transcribe Arabic language became a general linguistic practice for internet and sms. For example, 3 stands for the Arabic letter 'ain, 5 for kha', 6 for ṭa', 7 for ḥa' etc. When I saw transcripts from Samir's msn discussions I could not unravel the text at first. Some existing signs were also adapted to make chatting or sms easier; like: w8, lol, cos, plz, c u.

all their demands. That was too much for me, so I simply said 'fuck off and good-bye' to her. Anyone with money doesn't have to think like that. Then I would have married a girl from the camp whom I know personally and saw daily. M.D. I don't think about leaving the camp. A. Well, maybe only you, but most of us do.

This interview illustrates the juxtaposition of internet, love, and politics in the Palestinian refugee camps. It shows how the virtual space is a tremendous source for people, but also that it does not fulfil all the needs. The online experiences are embedded in the fight for offline mobility and political/social solutions, and part of the everyday struggles.

6.6 Conclusion

Internet Cafes are the offline settings of a virtual Palestine and captures the interlock of virtual and everyday life. This affects both Palestinians inside the territorial boundaries and outside in the dispersed diaspora. Whether used for political or leisure activities, the ICs are spaces susceptible to political, technological, and social changes. Inspired by this dynamic approach it was possible to look *beyond* the practical and obvious manifestations at first sight, and discover the processes of change and agency that co-direct the evolution and participation *beneath* the service of the ICs.

While walking round the camp and hanging around in the local internet cafes I got a view from below which enabled me to see the (illegal) cable networks, UPS boxes, and the creative tapping of satellite connection not noticeable otherwise. Critical anthropology adopts an inclusive perspective in order to see agency in social life online and offline, and how both are dialectically connected. Rather than generalizing internet use, I thus presented the internal dynamics and dialectic relations in terms of economic relations and social class (i.e. affects on and by everyday processes). ICs can be understood as both a tool and an end in itself (in terms of meeting others and engaging in social activities online), and also as both at the same time.

Through the virtual pilgrimages in the ICs I noted interesting changes with regards to how peoples' everyday life impacts internet access and use, and how internet use impacts everyday life. Transgressing the boundaries of ordinary acceptable behavior is one of the crucial changes I discussed. After talking with ISP's and IC owners in the West Bank, Gaza, and Lebanon about the open character of internet and Islamic rules, I found that mainly gambling and pornography are not allowed. Islam doesn't discourage internet use, and since Muslims actively use this international platform to propagate, disseminate, as well as attain messages, the opposite is true. Nahr al-Bared showed the importance of the agency of refugees that defended internet use, and clarified how different (political/economic) motivations are involved.

ICs offer access to the world to marginal and excluded communities because of its affordable and easy internet connection, allowing them to exchange news and ideas, and also to create new relationships with other people face-to-face because ICs are acceptable public spaces where people can safely assemble. Flirting online and later, if possible, dating offline, are becoming common experiences. Chatting gives way to friendships or romances. Both secrecy and positive self-representation (whether a woman, refugee, Palestinian, or poor, fat, old etc) have found their place in internet's social spaces. Yet, Dali and Maryam show that an online relationship still needs to be *verified* in everyday life, whether by a personal visit or a secret rendezvous. The internet also enables people to overcome gender or refugee discrimination. This led me to a closer analysis of the social functions of such public spaces.

Internet availability and new virtual network communities impose new interpretations about place, time, and space that are best examined in their local setting. By calling for an interrelated process between technology and social practice these changes become visible. The 'junction' between technology and social practices could be seen through love relationships or linguistic styles; alternative cyber slang eases the practice of online flirting/dating. The internet provides models of entertainment and serves as a communicate tool for people separated by geography, culture, politics, or gender. It is also important for empowerment as seen through several case study examples because sharing ideas and feelings with other men and women helps to by-pass existing social isolations. At the same time people can access information about topics related to sexuality or politics, previously unavailable on this scale and with this speed and anonymity.

This chapter related to the first part of the research question—what is *the role of the internet in creating trans-national linkages and imagined Palestinian communities*. However, the political aspect as represented in the second part of the research question—how internet is *used in mobilizing local and trans-national (pro) Palestinian activism*, is clearly present and weaved in the debates about public sphere, Islam, and occupation. Furthermore, the negative impact of (mixed) public ICs and (in the Occupied Territories particularly) their dangerous contexts due to the Israeli military presence, limits the participation of women in (curfew) ICs in general, and young (unmarried) women in the refugee camps in specific. However, many examples of male and female agency also proved that participation in internet activities was high among female students and workers. This confirms the dialectic relation between political-economic structures on one hand, and participation in the information-society on the other. Both directions may impact gender disparities within society. Looking at these everyday *rules of engagement* sheds light on the new attitude/forms of everyday agency. The *publicness* of the IC challenges ruling dominant morals/powers and is therefore in essence political. This is in fact an inevitable consequence when analyzing trans-national online communities from the specific juxtaposition of the off with the online. I will do the same in the next chapter, but there the question will be how the internet provided (pro) Palestinians the opportunity to resist the occupation, mobilize international political support, and engage in cyber warfare with (pro) Israeli's.

Chapter 7: Everyday Resistance and the Virtual Intifada

> I am unable to fight for Palestine so I try this [via internet] the best way I can. When we do this, we feel excitement and joy inside. We can hardly wait to get a new target. – Hacktivist from Tripoli, Lebanon

> The use of the internet in a patriotic way may lead to the continuation of the general struggle. – Abu Basel, PLO representative South-Lebanon

7.1 Introduction

Activists use the internet as a means of resistance. Dissemination of (alternative) information is of immense importance in the competition over audiences—i.e., their potential supporters. A new era in the battle over information and political organizing is marked by the grass-roots internet availability; internet users gained more democratic control over content and representation of news, and activists have erected new online sources like *Indymedia* and blogs. A well designed petition calling for protest or support, is updated with the latest facts and statistics, spiced up with pictures from the internet and a link to film footage on *You Tube,* and then emailed to thousands of people across the globe in a matter of hours. All this is possible with a low budget; it would have sounded like science fiction ten years ago but today it is part of the everyday tactics for many activist groups. As a tool for political organizations, internet clearly differs from previous tactics of organizing where time, distance, censorship, and financial issues were significant handicaps.

Informed by the spirit of the Mexican Zapatistas in 1995, WTO (*Battle of Seattle*) protests in 1999, and the unprecedented February 15th protests in 2003 all over the world, the internet was used to construct (new) social and political relationships. It was used with increasing enthusiasm when a tide of activism arose and a global movement began to emerge to challenge Bush's war politics. Meanwhile, many of these groups 'matured' and various union, feminist, ecological, peace, and anti-capitalist groups linked-up. With this development, many have "overcome the limitations of postmodern identity politics" as it provided a basis for "new political alliances and solidarity" (Kellner and Kahn 2004:89). The development of an alternative media *concurred* with political activism, as the great upsurge of (political) internet use together with the intensification of protest in 1999 and 2001 have showed. More internet militancy emerged when hackers helped create Open Source software. With this software activists/groups can circumvent bans by exploiting wireless networks (Kellner and Kahn 2004:90).

Many of these developments were also represented with regards to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The engagement of international supporters and the political use of the internet by Palestinians themselves, asks for closer exploration. The aim of this chapter is to answer the research question —*How is internet used to*

mobilize local and trans-national pro-Palestinian activism—and thus, to turn to the third and final tension as outlined in Chapter One: *resistance* vs. *oppression*. At times, the impacts of the recent *War on Terror* security measures and the massive arrests Palestinians and destruction of their towns/camps, limited my access and chances to conduct interviews. And sometimes the fluctuation of people's enthusiasm to talk about their internet usage also impinged on my research.[180] Nevertheless, despite the difficult context, fieldwork generated scores of examples that highlight the dialectic relation between resistance and internet, bringing the context of oppression to the fore. The overarching issue since 9/11 in Palestinian politics is the debate about politics in the media.

It is widely assumed that the increase of media propaganda was meant to influence the "hearts and minds"; this "newspeak" logic, as Orwell called it, shaped a pro-war common sense. Thus internet engagement was primarily triggered by the aspiration to narrate alternative analyses about Palestine. Competition over Western audiences was central to *Hear Palestine, Palestine Monitor* mailing lists, and other websites. Moreover, though closure and military repression limited the possibility to organize public meetings by political parties, lively online debates and mobilization evolved alternative public spheres instead. Political internet use matured with the creation of discussion forums by popular political movements like Hamas and Fatah in the height of the Legislative Elections.

Countering media bias and organizing local and global political mobilizations, led to the birth of a (pro-Palestinian) *technopolitical* fringe, a new activism that I call *Cyber Intifada*. These examples begin to answer the research objective and will be further discussed in the next sections. First I will discuss the transformation of Palestinian representation and show how the internet has functioned as a political instrument in the struggle for national recognition. The dominant politics of the media represents the historical transformations in the ways Palestinians have been perceived: sometimes as *victims*, often as *terrorists*. This led to a political outcry for a *permission to narrate* their history, reflected in the (re)construction of a collective public sphere by dispersed diaspora groups in the preceding chapters.

Media activists mainly target audiences in the US and Europe because media distortions about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the West favour Israel. They develop a *counter-public-sphere* and form *counterpublics* (Warner 2002), as I conceptualised in Chapter Two. That is why many websites aim at *re-humanizing* Palestinians, as illustrated in Chapter Five. Official/mass media (print, television, radio) as significant channels for constructing knowledge and ideas are absent for Palestinians. The appropriation of new technology by oppressed communities as part of their everyday resistance made the internet an influential tool. This is an important background to the birth of media activism. I will debate how this new type of activism, sometimes a

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[180] Sometimes there was suspicion regarding the work of journalists and researchers. More important were people's everyday priorities; surviving the economic and military destruction of the Palestinian social-economic fabric at times also meant that internet engagement was not an essential topic during my meetings and interviews.

war of words, is fought. Because their own accounts—uprising—are not televized, other mediation is required.

One of the arguments in the *second* section is that the media is not neutral and therefore the *revolution will not be televized*, as Gill Scot Heron sang in the 1970s. The outbreak of the Intifada in 2000 rallied broad political support and the proliferation of new media technology was able to add a new dimension to the Palestinian politics of resistance. (Pro) Palestinians in the West, and many Palestinian groups in the occupied territories and diaspora, played a crucial role in convincing Western audiences of the Palestinian plight. These different Palestinian settings tell us something about the different kinds of involvement and implementation of politics. In Palestine the internet is not the primary tool for persuasion and mobilization because they don't need to be convinced and already have existing structures for mobilization and resistance. But internet is there used for improving the way the struggle against occupation is organized. Palestinians from the refugee diasporic settings also engage in political support and should not be overlooked. Chatting and debating with pro-Israel opponents in order to persuade them, correspondence with Palestinians inside the OT to comfort and encourage them, and sabotaging pro-Israeli websites to attack them, are the three major ways of everyday resistance by which grass-roots involvement is demonstrated in the diaspora.

The *third* part of this chapter therefore debates how internet and activism fused in the offline diasporic settings. While not confusing strategy with tactics, and by also seeing the limitations of resistance (and going beyond a *utopian vs. dystopian* view), local and global online mobilization contribute to Palestinian resistance. While watching their fellow Palestinians throwing stones and organizing protest, many young Palestinians in exile wanted to engage as well: if not with real then with *virtual stones*. Playing Intifada/combat games in the refugee camp internet cafes, or confronting pro/Israeli stereotypes by countering them via online forums, are examples of how a sense of collective participation in the struggle can be experienced through the internet. Besides convincing Americans or emailing Palestinians in the West Bank or Gaza, more confrontational tactics also developed. The clearest transformation is the shift from debating into attacking by political hacking. *Pro* and *anti* Israel hacktivists were involved in virtual battles. For the exceptional cases that did not consider online debates or hacktivism sufficient enough/anymore the internet was deployed to organize *guerrilla* type responses.

In order to understand the strong need for the internet one needs to look behind the media (smoke)screens (Philo and Berry 2004). The Israeli atrocities in the OT and the continuation of events that often resembled David vs. Goliath, sharply contrasted with the abstract lip service about Palestinian rights. Whether consciously or because of the *"Israelization of Middle East policy"* (Beinin 2003), the way the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is re-interpreted is probably the most debatable of all contemporary conflicts. I therefore start with the consequence of biased media politics because this will help us understand why many people wanted to take matters

into their own hands or, how internet technology has enabled a counter-public space to narrate the experience of oppression.

7.2 Permission to Narrate: Documenting Palestinian History

> I began a lifelong struggle and attempt to demystify the capriciousness and hypocrisy of a power whose authority depended absolutely on its ideological self-image as a moral agent, acting in good faith and with unimpeachable intentions. Said, 1999.

Permission to narrate refers to an earlier critique by Said in 1984. He, perhaps more than anyone else, practiced the right to articulate the Palestinian narrative in many articles and books. As the quote from his later *Out of Place: A Memoir (*1999) above illustrates, it is important for people to communicate their own history. Pioneering research about the social impact of communication technology has shaped our understanding about media. Raymond Williams (1961) was the first to comprehensively stress the need to study the power relations involved. The practice of assigning cultural status and capital is not a neutral exercise. These power relations help to clarify how culture made *for* the people rather than *by* the people are served by class interests, as P.H. Thompson (1978) showed in his renowned work. One of the notions connected to these cultural theories concerns the politics of representation; a particularly influential form of this notion came to be known as Orientalism.[181]

Orientalism unveiled how European colonialism (continues to) shapes relationships between the West and the Non-West. A stereotypical view of Islam/Arabs is increasingly being portrayed as determining the actions of Muslims and Arabs. Moors (2004) argued, "Such a culturalist approach downplays the impact of economic and political structures, it overlooks other uses of differentiation such as class, locality and ethnicity, and leaves little space for agency". As important studies stressed, 'reliable' representation and adequate access to media can only be gained through struggle (Hall 1996). Critical tradition in cultural/media research such as these should also be adapted to 'new media'. New media represents several changes in the scope, scale, supply, and mediation through a greater access to ICT technologies. However, promoting access with little regard for the structures and processes of power that are embedded in, and contribute to, the inequalities in information societies is problematic (Mansell 2004:97).

Studying the growing development of decentralized new-media is essential vis-à-vis practices of democracy. A shift from state controlled media to electronic and local access to media production has influenced the level of participation. *Local* here

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[181] Most notable by Edward Said is *Orientalism (*1979). As this concept was multi-interpretable, it became a basket term and eventually depoliticized of its main critical message. See Irfan Habib *Critical notes on Edward Said* International Socialist Journal, issue 108, 2005.

does not literally mean the scale or level, but a specific participatory, decentralized, relevance as discussed in Chapter Five. Local and grass-roots media escapes state control and therefore plays a potential role in the mobilization of people (Meyer 2001). This shift redefines the *public sphere*, helping to include what should constitute public action. The grass-roots media (contrary to dominant mass media) offers strategies to penetrate the political debate *from below*. Sometimes media representation and social change (counter-public-sphere) break into the common domain and are able to contest dominant ideological claims. Downey and Fenton (2003) show that the relation between public sphere and society is not objective but embedded in the realm of power/interests. This kind of critique regarding the *public sphere* has become common sense. Public communication does not *by design* produce social integration. The public sphere concept is not essentially outdated; but it certainly needs reinterpretation, as Downey and Fenton (2003) argue:

> A central question for Habermas is whether these groups in civil society can intervene in the mass media public sphere and change the agenda through bringing about a critical process of communication. This can be exceedingly difficult to do in a market-led, mass-mediated system enveloped in its own professional ideologies about what is and what is not newsworthy, about who is a credible source of opinion and information, and who is not (Fenton et al., 1998). Furthermore, the ability of alternative forms of communication to encourage progressive social change must be set in the context of the global dominance of multi-media conglomerates such as NewsCorp and AOL/TimeWarner (:188).

Several such decentralized media were discussed in the preceding chapters with reference to empirical examples of parallel/alternative Palestinian public mediation forms. These new public spheres managed to counter official and dominant representations of information. In October 2000, the *September 2000 Clashes Information Centre* launched the first comprehensive political internet response, set up by activists who were experienced in earlier internet activism; this website was clearly inspired by the *On the Ground in Ramallah* website of 1996. This blending of journalism and grass-roots participation became the leading format of many websites that arose with the outbreak of the Second Intifada. Critical revisions are particularly fascinating when considering developments of internet media and politics in the Middle East. In order to contextualize the urgency and enthusiasm for the internet I shall demonstrate the politics of the media in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. I will furthermore continue by presenting the birth of a new form of activism.

Politics of the Media: Between Terrorists and Revolutionaries

> Just say the word "media" to your average diaspora Palestinian and you find out pretty quickly what the phrase "open a can of worms" really means. Nigel Parry (1999).

> I have been following the news of the Intifada. I have compared the

images on BBC and CNN with those on Al Jazira and other Arab channels. I have unspun stories, fumed at the American newspapers, and been grateful for some of the reporting in some British press. I have started and ended my days reading appeals for help on the internet. And over and over again I have asked myself 'what is it that I can do? Ahdaf Soueif (2001).

Habermas' negative interpretation regarding the impact of mass media has been countered by the growing radicalization of progressive political movements during the 1960s, but also by new political rebellions via internet (Calhoun 1992:33). Habermas commented on Calhoun (1992: 438) that he was, "too pessimistic about resisting power and above all the critical potential of a pluralistic internally much differentiated mass public". The development of capitalist mass media is clearly not linear and there will be space for alternative strategies. On the development of electronic media Habermas continues:

Thus the mass media have contradictory effects in other dimensions as well. There is considerable evidence attesting to the ambivalent nature of the democratic potential of a public sphere whose infrastructure is marked by the growing selective constraints imposed by electronic mass communication (in Calhoun 1992:456).

This ambivalence and the space for agency is the reason why Nigel Parry could continued his 'can of worms' warning by saying: "…As soon as you find space to get a word in edgewise, cheer them up by telling them about two new and very important websites". The launching of the two websites he refers to (*Bitter Pill* and *Out Load)* were motivated by the strong need to resist hegemonic media structures and information bias. After the 1993 Oslo peace process, Birzeit University launched its website as the first in Palestine in 1994. This was followed by *On the ground in Ramallah* in 1996, and BZU *Out Loud* online radio station connecting listeners inside and outside Palestine in 1998. The major reason was that activists were disturbed by a widening gap between the lived realities and presented images of Palestine (Hanieh 1999).

Activists use the Internet is utilized to make themselves and their ideas visible in the global public sphere, to communicate their political and cultural messages to the 'outside' world (including the diaspora). Palestinian resistance against curfews, closures, occupying soldiers, or colonial settlers, are often framed as *terrorism*, and criticism against Israeli policy is easily labelled *anti-Semitism*. Many Palestinians believed that this is one of the reasons why a sufficient international solidarity is lacking and why Western governments tend to support Israel. It is important to analyze these developments because we can hardly understand the urge for (and significance of) such internet outlets without understanding how a common frame is currently used in the Palestinian–Israeli politics of representation.

The West's interpretation of Palestinians (and their political case) saw several transformations that are quite significant. The first time Palestinians were introduced

to a broad (Western) audience was in the 1970s via news on highjack and kidnap operations after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 and the revived Palestinian resistance movements – most famously, the 1972 Pan Am Airplane highjack by PFLP guerrilla activist Laila Khaled. Although, from a Third World/Anticolonial point of view, her operation was an act of resistance and an attempt to voice a demand for political recognition, the event is usually referred to as a typical act of Arab *terrorism*. A repetitive portrayal of Arabs as the bloodthirsty angry-looking 'other' in American Hollywood films contributed heavily to this trend (Shaheen 2001).[182]

The massacres in Lebanese refugee camps in 1982 and the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987 portrayed a different image of Palestinians; they were also depicted as *victims*. Television cameras inside the camps and occupied territories showed images of youth defying tanks and guns with stones. Aided by grass-roots technology of a growing international protest movement against neo-liberalism and war, the Second Intifada in 2000 showed another image, beyond the portrayal of Palestinians as either terrorists or victims.

Growing support and the politicized situation also generated new forms of resistance. Especially for a new generation of activists participating in the post-Seattle anti-capitalist movements, Palestinians were later also viewed as *revolutionaries*. The Palestinian flag and *kufiyya* (usually referred to as *hatta*, the black and white blocked Palestinian shawl,) became symbols of resistance in worldwide protests movements such as at the G8 protests in Genoa (2001), the global '15 February' antiwar demonstrations (2003), and at the European Social Forums. The new circumstances generate everyday forms of activism in which the media plays an important role. This raised alarm among rightwing and pro-Israel supporters who were also keen to, on the contrary, use the internet to spread the image of Palestinian terrorism.

Presenting Arabs as the main perpetrators of terror fed such fears. This strategy worked much better after 9/11 as the War on Terror increased Islamophobia, especially in Europe.[183] There are many sophisticated examples of distortions that have become common sense in the West. Edward Said at the time, summarized most of them as "Barak offered more concessions at Camp David than any PM before him, Arafat cowardly lacked the necessary courage to accept Israeli offers to end the conflict, Palestinian violence has threatened the existence of Israel… and there are all sorts of variations to this, including anti Semitism, suicidal rage to get on television, sacrificing children as martyrs …" (2001:259). Not all realities can be denied, and some of the coverage is inevitable. But, for the majority of audiences in the West, the changes still have not been that radical.

A survey by the Israeli daily *Haaretz* about editorials in mainstream American newspapers showed that when the Intifada broke out, 67 editorials in 19 papers clearly

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[182] In *Real Bad Arabs* Jack Shaheen (2001) describes Hollywood's vilification of Arabs on the screen with Arabs seen as the insidious others in more than 700 films.
[183] One form of deception is to label Palestinian resistance to occupation as the 'threat of Islam', or as Muslim fanatics who take cover behind slogans of Palestinian liberation.

expressed sympathy for Israel, 17 gave a somewhat balanced analysis, and only nine voiced criticism against Israeli leaders (Dor 2004). This showed a clear pattern of support for Israel.[184] Other surveys showed that it were prominent Israelis who often did the writing, underlining the extent to which "Palestinians are not permitted to speak on their own behalf but must be represented by others, if at all" (Ali Abunimah and Hussain Ibish 2001:234). It is important to know why this continues to be the case. These two explanations give a reasonable answer: lack of explanation about the origin of the conflict in the media; difference in the manner in which both sides are presented. Both have measurable effects on public understanding.

In an extensive study by Philo and Berry (2004)[185] it was shown that the British media constructs a particular public knowledge in relation to the Intifada which disadvantages Palestinians. The first handicap is that they are mainly Muslim and Arab. 'Cultural' differences, in terms of who the Western audience identifies with, are important because people tend to sympathize with people who look and sound like them. Thus, rejecting views of people who look 'strange' is a common phenomenon. The ways in which specific events are filmed also reveals how differently these categories are mediated. Tania Forte (2002) at Ben Gurion University considers that the production of video news footage about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict utilizes culturally specific perspectives of the self and the other. This creates various types of narratives and proves that besides content, the use of different framings plays an important role. According to Forte, therefore, "When Al Jazeera and Israeli Channel 2 news represented the same footage of the Jenin refugee camp, they interpreted it differently".

These findings are relevant in understanding how power relations are altered, and that grasping the reasons and origins of the conflict is crucial. Otherwise, there is little understanding of the conflict or the people involved. When Philo and Berry transcribed 89 news bulletins between 28-9-2000 and 16-10 2000, the first thing they discovered was that news coverage about Palestine does not refer to the main issues, and even less explained the history of the conflict. The main message about Palestine contained violence and tragedies. But when refugee rights are not mentioned as one of the key issues of the conflict, it is not surprising that only 8% of the people even knew that Palestinian refugees were displaced from their homes by Israel in 1948. Many of the interviewed did not even understand who was occupying Palestinian land and why. As a consequence some even believed the Palestinians were occupying the territories, or that the Settlers were actually Palestinian. Without knowledge about the origins, the viewer is left with day-to-day events in which it can appear that the 'normal' world is 'disrupted' only by Palestinian riots or bombs. The first three years, news tended to swing between this view and the view that 'both sides' perpetrated violence in a 'cycle' of killing, to which Israel often has to 'respond'. The modes of

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[184] Israelis spoke twice as much on TV news as Palestinians.
[185] Their study *Bad News from Israel* focused on news coverage by BBC1 and ITV.

representation and ways in which Israelis and Palestinians were described were clearly different.

'Murder', 'atrocity', 'lynching', 'savage cold blooded killing' were used to describe Israeli victims. On top of this, Israeli viewpoints were consequently adopted by journalists and built into the structure of coverage. Two days before the 'Ramallah lynching' that received round the clock and worldwide condemnation, two Palestinians in the Northern West Bank town Tulkarem were chased, tortured, and stabbed to death by settlers. The two undercover Israeli agents were caught and later killed in a police station. Everything was filmed, and though the footage of an enraged crowd waving with blood on their hands was aired on all major stations, the murders of the two Palestinians was only incidentally referred to, or not all. It is not possible to exactly measure political effects of the media, yet it is meaningful that while nearly ten times as many Palestinians have been killed only 30% of those interviewed by Philo and Berry thought so. As explained, this debate is mystified because criticizing Israeli policies or pro-Israeli lobby groups quickly receive the *anti-Semitism* stamp.[186]

But as hinted above, there is also another trend. Thanks to the internet, Al Jazeera could air their (often competing) live reports on the net and BBC's footage of the killings of Palestinian children by Israeli tanks in a Jenin market reached many people through email and news groups. According to Ramzy Baroud:

> It's the reader who now decides where the truth lies, at CNN or AntiWar.com, at ABC or Al Jazeera. This is what journalism was meant to be, balanced. Israel is concerned about the Internet, its global accessibility and wide growth…A short message, sent via slow connection somewhere in Ramallah could reach thousands of people all over the world in minutes, refuting the Israeli claims (2001).

Internet has played a strategic role in this attempt to counter the mainstream media and demystify some of the myths concerning the Intifada. Thus as the only accessible mass medium, the use of internet became a means to counter marginalization. Media activism was like a war, not with weapons but with words. How do we assess this new phenomenon, and what is the status/performance of Palestinian internet?

The Birth of Media Activism: War of Words

I thought "We have to do something..." When I began to work on the

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[186] In May 2005, Bram de Swaan, professor at the University of Amsterdam wrote a piece titled "Anti Israel Enthousiasme" (Anti-Israel Enthusiasm) in which he explains that anti-Semitism is sometimes an easy reflex against criticizing Israel, but that there is also political 'confusion' among critics of Israel. In these (somewhat condescending) analyses, critics often do not understand when they are legitimately attacking Israeli politics or whether it is their emotion/anger towards Israel. The problem is that this logic comes down to (a softer/sophisticated) legitimization of the deplorable system of framing criticism of Israel as anti-Semitism. Naomi Klein (2002) made a more fruitful suggestion by calling on pro-Palestinian activists to have/adopt a clear position against anti-Semitism..

Birzeit University website in 1995 it was with Said's phrase very clearly in mind… it finally dawned on me, permission to narrate our side of the story now lay at a nearby web address www.birzeit.edu! For the next four days, during this explosion, which ultimately claimed 88 Palestinian and 16 Israeli lives, and resulted in several thousand injured Palestinians, a group of us worked day and night on the site. –Parry, 2003.

The outbreak of the al-Aqsa' Intifada in 2000 forced organizations and activists to regroup and, most importantly, rethink their tactics. One of the issues all participants agreed about was a serious reform of Palestinian public relations and a broadly based battle against the pro-Israeli media. With new ICT instruments, it became possible to combat some of the stereotypes. Several web design companies started to offer their services to increase a Palestinian presence on the internet "so that the world could better understand the realities of the Palestinian situation".[187] People and organizations in and outside Palestine started to produce websites, mailing lists, and online-discussion groups to counter anti-Palestinian myths. Local/Palestinian internet projects became an alternative to mainstream media for many people. The activist groups and projects often had in common that they mainly targeted the international world/western audience and aimed to *re-humanize* Palestinians (Chapter Five).

The "permission to narrate" thus means showing pictures and personal stories 'from within'. The importance lies in the fact that they evoke greater understanding; authentic messengers or sources generate more inspiration/persuasion. Palestinians had no space to voice that message themselves. The message was something impersonal, had less emotional authority. Maher from Shatila camp explained to me why this is a problem:

If I tell you a story that I didn't really experience myself, you will not be affected as much as when it was indeed my experience. And maybe you will be more compassionate with me on a human basis. What happened to us as Palestinians is that others are continuously talking about us or on our behalf.

Correcting the biased views in the media was the initial and strongest political motive for internet use among (pro) Palestinian activists. The internet emerged as an innovative and affordable platform for those otherwise denied the space to tell their stories. It was one of the first attempts to document their contemporary history. Three years after I first gazed at the pages transferred online from Ramallah to Amsterdam, I met the initiators of the earlier websites. Adam explained the importance as he told me during an interview in 2001, "When someone comes back in 30 years to write about this Intifada, it will be much easier than it was for us to write about the First Intifada".

Electronic Intifada and *Palestine Monitor* had a profound impact as they developed into highly successful website projects with visitors reaching up to 1 million

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[187] *Solidarity Design* www.solidaritydesign.com, as discussed in Chapter Five.

a month. Mailing lists were a successful asset to the mushrooming internet cafes (Chapter Three/Four). A mailing list, for which one can request subscription or be added to by others, can be a frequently appearing newsletter or an interactive communication list that is open for reactions. Websites that have revolutionized Palestinian internet, such as *Palestine Monitor, Al Awda*, and *Electronic Intifada* also introduced their own mailing lists. Karma in Ramallah launched *Hear Palestine* and gave daily and sometimes hourly inside reports of the Intifada. She invited journalists and offered them a tour around the occupied territories and encounters with local people and places that Western journalists hardly ever visited, as Luyendijk (2006) demonstrated.

One of Karma's exceptional tactics was designed to tackle this problem; with her non-elite strategies Karma shows that the *Mountain goes to Mohammed* instead of the other way around:

> The *American Colony* [restaurant/café in East Jerusalem] is probably the most Palestinian-type place journalists are willing to be at. Most foreign journalists hang out there for their meetings and networking. I go there with my *Hear Palestine* print-out reports and distribute them. When I can't leave Ramallah [due to curfew and closures], I call the owner and ask him to distribute the weekly report in the café, which I email him.

This special necessity is embedded in the combined effect of the discriminatory ethnocentrism and media structures. During an interview with *Palestine Monitor* organizer Trish we talked about this specific challenge. She was clear about the targeted audience: "Our audience is outside but we can't get to them [through the regular channels], and that is why we need the internet." She explained that Palestinians are often criticized for lacking good representation/PR, and that this information strategy is also one of the major reasons she is active with *Palestine Monitor*. But she also said that all the information is out there; that the journalists know or can easily know, but that the messenger is considered the obstacle – as if the Arab/Palestinian/Muslim source filters the content away. I asked her whether she was not maintaining ethnocentric media structures by adapting to them:

> Sending an email in my name has a different result than when Mohammed does, most people are actually not even aware of the racism. But you see, we can't single-handedly fight racism; meanwhile we have to act because the fact is that people are going to be prejudiced while we still must find a way to tell them about the 10-month old baby that was killed here. Palestinians basically don't have time. I am not dramatizing things; people die on a daily basis and its horrible, so yes, maybe we must operate within the racist structure in order to at least get some of the facts across (13/8/2002).

Besides the achievements of *Palestine Monitor* and *Hear Palestine*, other examples that specialized in media activism were found as well, such as Alaa's media activism. During an interview in 2001 he commented:

> When they published a story about the Palestine Israeli conflict you could

> not find a listing of a Palestinian source while all other countries were listed. After our internet protests and mobilization they changed the link list and made it Palestinian, Israeli, Jordanian…etc. We also complained about the word *rubber bullets* in their reports of Palestinian casualties because the name suggested something innocent.

Previously, CNN and other major Western media outlets adopted Israeli terminology and called them *rubber bullets* – a factually inaccurate term that softened the depiction of Israeli violence. CNN had to adjust its list of 'related links' and after many debates, media activists helped introduce the term *rubber coated steel bullets*. This forms the battle over terminology, a substantial part of activism. Especially as pro-Israeli initiatives continuously monitor reports on the Middle East and engage in such PR activities.

However, established foreign journalists tend to also duplicate these manufacturings. Well-known examples of organized media lobbying are the work of the rightwing and conservative MEMRI and pro-Israel media groups *Hagannah* or one with the ironic title *Honest Reporting*.[188] One of the results of the latter's successful work was the order BBC gave to its reporters to use the phrase 'targeted killing' instead of 'assassination'.[189] Following substantial attacks from right wing groups and internal pressures, CNN also instructed its reporters to use certain terms in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict during the time that the Intifada was daily news. Reporters were asked to abstain from referring to Gilo as "a Jewish settlement" and instead use "a Jewish neighbourhood" as a description (Fisk, 2001).[190] This is not just a matter of semantics.

Censoring the word *settlement* in relation to Gilo was inaccurate because Gilo was illegally annexed by Israel. In fact, it was occupied *after* the already illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, and thus a *colonial settlement*. The choice of words has consequences because they lead to euphemisms. The problem of euphemisms became even more a phenomenon with regards to the Wall erected by Israel, turning Palestinian territory into separate Bantustans and confiscating more Palestinian land in the process. It is referred to as a *'security fence'* because the Israeli government websites avoid using the term *separation wall* in order to hide the negative

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[188] Despite MEMRI's political affiliation, it has, successfully, aimed at preserving its credibility as a source for journalists and commentators. MEMRI was founded by former Israeli intelligence officers Colonel Yigal Carmon and Likudist Meyrav Wurmser. MEMRI's "about us" page (http://www.memri.org/aboutus.html) does not mention Israel and claims to provide "timely translations of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish media, as well as original analysis of political, ideological, intellectual, social, cultural, and religious trends in the Middle East.", yet most of the site is about Israel. Moreover, the material MEMRI translates tilts toward representing Arab discourse critical of Israel/Jews as anti-Semitic. See also the (exceptional) critical article in Guardian (August 12, 2002). http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,,773258,00.html.

[189] Robert Fisk *CNN caves in to Israel* The Independent, 3 September 2001.

[190] The head of CNN Ted Turner had to apologize and step down because he had equated Palestinian suicide bombing with Israeli military retaliation; he was accused of promoting suicide bombings against Israelis. http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2002/aug/02/middleeastthemedia.television. See also for an in depth analysis of the paralyzing effect the issue of suicide bombings has in academic circles: Ghassan Hage (2003), 'Comes a time we are all enthusiasm': Understanding Palestinian Suicide Bombers in times of Exighophobia, Public Culture, Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter, pp. 65 – 89.

practice behind the words.[191] This implies political dominance of the general Israeli political perspective, which usually transcends into a *hegemonization* of terminology, making *separation* the common and *apartheid wall* the odd language. In fact, most Palestinians and peace activists refer to it as the Apartheid Wall.[192] The tactical use of words and terms to evoke emotion/solidarity happen on all sides of the debate; politically charged terms like *apartheid wall* mean to resonate with South Africa to link the Palestinian struggle with South African blacks and Israelis with (white) Afrikaners.

No language is neutral, but the difference is that certain terms are more normalized than others, indicating a *linguistic hegemony*. For example, many people in the West have come to associate terror with Islam, even though Muslims do not commit most acts of terror. These associations come to the fore because we are often conditioned by the logics of a particular discourse, making us susceptible/interpret social reality according to dominant frameworks.[193] This conscious/unconscious *falsification* of terms diminishes actual effects of political structures, and sometimes causes debate among journalists. As Robert Fisk wrote, eventually this practice comes down to "Searching for euphemisms for what is really happening". Usually it is explained that 'both sides' in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have to be taken into consideration, which is in fact another illustration where neutrality in the 'hegemonized' world of the media comes down to legitimizing the stronger party.[194]

As I argued, this is particularly important in discussions about Palestinian activist (im-)possibilities. For almost 60 years Palestinians have been a non-state people and weak in front of the military and political world powers of the US and Israel. Rather than representing the political field itself and bearing in mind the unequal power balance, the internet is viewed to be a *tool*. But because of the discrepancy in the politics of representation/power it is an even more important tool. This chapter thus represents the juxtaposition of Palestinian politics and technological developments, and considers the internet an important medium for political mobilization. I consider this virtual Intifada part of the *existing* set of tactics, such as posters, underground papers, and street activism. The internet has expanded the spectrum of political involvement without necessarily sacrificing a specific mode of recruitment, mobilization, or existing hierarchies. With this approach, I avoid neglecting/exaggerating the potential problems of internet technology.

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[191] The term that enjoyed the most frequent use in Google would be chosen. It sounds irreproachable at first sight, but if one realizes how many retailers online sell security fences for gardens—while it's hard to find anyone selling 'apartheid walls' online, the pitfall is clear. This was conducted by Steven Klein of Jewish Agency for Israel see *The Security Fence - Hopes and Fears*, found at www.jafi.org.il/education/actual/conmflict/fence/. For more on this dubious Google search, see *Israel's West Bank Barrier: Semantics on the Internet* found at www.electronicintifada.net.

[192] http://www.stopthewall.org/

[193] http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/EU_Terrorism_Situation_and_Trend_Report_TE-SAT/TESAT2007.pdf. The well-known piece by Iqbal Ahmad on the term 'Terrorism' can be found at: http://www.sangam.org/ANALYSIS/Ahmad.htm

[194] See for example many of Chomsky's writings about the relation between media and the Palestine-Israeli conflict. In his writings Tony Cliff (2000), himself Jewish who left Israel, wrote about the tendency to equate the Palestinian struggle for independence and their means, with the Israeli occupation forces and their military superiority: "it is like comparing a sardine with a shark".

The internet offers a great foundation of alternative resources for media observers, academics, and activists, sometimes offering a more balanced content and discourse.[195] Alternative internet media becomes even more relevant when it implies greater mobilization as it offers an alternative space for planning and organization. In other words, direct/indirect activism and local/global mobilization emerged as the popular motives; the internet proved to be an effective tool for mobilizing activism.

7.3 The Revolution Will Not Be Televized

> The revolution will not be brought to you by the Schaefer Award Theatre and will not star Natalie Woods and Steve McQueen or Bullwinkle and Julia.
>
> The revolution will not give your mouth sex appeal. The revolution will not get rid of the nubs.
>
> The revolution will not make you look five pounds thinner, because the revolution will not be televized, Brother.
>
> The revolution will not be televized, will not be televized, will not be televized, will not be televized. The revolution will be no re-run brothers; The revolution will be live. Gil Scott-Heron (Album Ghetto Style, 1974)

In the 1960s and early 70s the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the US, developed a form of political activism that still inspires many activist movements all over the world. But these groups were depicted in the mainstream media as uncivilized or criminal. Malcolm X or the Black Panthers were even referred to as 'reverse' (anti-white) racists (Shawki 2006). The representation of black Americans then reminds us of the Palestinian image now. As the above excerpt from Gil Scott Heron's famous song suggests, official/state media didn't show the everyday Black reality, let alone oppression, or the causes that led to the upheavals; most of the media framework lacked the contexts related to the struggle and conflict. By the same token, the Palestinian struggle is frequently displayed as 'violent' and rarely as the expression of political agency and anticolonial resistance. (Pro) Palestinians dispute such outlets by making use of new electronic media forms. Internet media offers an accessible platform to disseminate, participate, and organize. The internet technology authorized a space to *narrate* the experience of suffering and struggle, but also to *mobilize* local and trans-national activism. Everyday use of the internet demonstrates online shared Palestinian nationalism and a political notion of *Palestinianess* and encloses secular, nationalist, leftist, and Islamist tendencies. Moreover, these online activities also help structure political agency from below.

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[195] An example of internet as an alternative media channel was the public hearing at the *International Court of Justice* (ISJ) in The Hague in 2004 on the Israeli wall. In response to the exceptional interest shown by the general public and the limited seating space, and of course the impossibility for most people to attend, the hearing was broadcasted live on the ICJ website.

The very fact that everyday-life gives rise to political agency is important in reference to what De Certeau (1984) described as *the everyday tactics* of non-elites, discussed in Chapter Two. In an outstanding article about ethnographic research during the First Intifada, Iris Jean-Klein (2001) argues that: "Ordinary persons fashion themselves into nationalized subjects, using distinctive narrative actions and embodied practices that are woven into the practice of everyday life" (:84). The distinguishable Palestinian-style resistance *Sumud* would at the time go as far as "the suspension of the everyday in the practice of everyday life" as a form of Palestinian resistance (:97-101). The difference between those who are in a position of power and represent it as the norm, and those who do not, is relevant in relation to understanding the power of (internet) media. Hegemonic power is resisted 'from below' on a daily basis, for example, by internet activists whose words and actions make up the grass-roots practices of everyday life, for which the term *hidden counter-practices* has been used (Franklin 2001:71-72).

Such counter-practices are the very practices usually meant by activism via and on the internet. A utopian understanding of cyber activism means that internet potential is exaggerated. Although cyber space means a compression of space and sometimes a collapse of time, do they pose "serious challenges to the understanding of resistance" (Fandy 1999:146)? In 1999, the nation-state may have seemed outdated because according to Fandy:

> Concepts such as the specific territory of the state will have to be reconsidered. In an era in which the discourse of the 'sovereign' is simply one among many discourses and in which these conversations transcend traditional notions of geographic boundary and the physical contours of the nation-state, political scientists will have to reconsider their fixed understanding of the sovereign state. Today's electronic media and satellite systems virtually dissolve the traditional barriers that once separated states and nations.

These typical utopian arguments attest to confusion between new important communication modes/access to mass media on one hand and free mobility, participation, and even national sovereignty on the other (Chapter Two). Yet in this research, sovereignty, mobility, and state are crucial, and the setting in a post-intifada/9-11 period shows that the concepts of resistance and state are still important. In the discussion about resistance in Chapter Two I explained that I both visibly staged "politics" and everyday/informal politics are important in understanding resistance. I find De Certau's theorizing of resistance important in his attempt to 'bend the stick' by challenging dystopian/Foucauldian discourse by highlighting possibilities and spaces of social agency vis-à-vis hegemony (Jean-Klein 2001:87). Through Bayat (1998), I noted that struggle can be found in a variety of different forms/degrees of activism, from political movement to protest movement or from survival strategy to everyday resistance. I thus proposed a Gramscian take on resistance because it displays a non-reductive alternative without disregarding existing

oppression marked by indirect hegemony and direct state power. In the extremely complex reality of Palestinian politics this is an important reminder.

Israeli anthropologist Jeff Halper (2006) defines three phases of strategy that guarantee Israeli control over Palestinians: irreversible facts on the ground, US approval, and unilateral border declarations. In this context, he argues that the collective response by Palestinians generally knows three main elements: *sumud*/resistance, negotiation, and attrition. According to Helga Baumgarten (2005), even despite the differences between the three main manifestations of Palestinian nationalism (Arab Nationalism, Palestinian Nationalism/Fatah, Islamist/Hamas) each followed a similar trajectory: they begin with maximalist (including armed struggle) goals but scale them back under the impact of Israel's overwhelming power. These realities make other forms of resistance relevant and worth trying. I'd rather refer to these new forms of resistance as tactical shifts rather than radical/strategic breaks. These tactical cyber transformations by themselves deserve our attention and investigation.

Internet use clearly impacts political action and mobilization at the national and international level. The internet meant that *Azzedeen Qassem* (Hamas' military wing) could organize discussions on their online forum *'Qassam meeting point'* via qassamiyoon.com.[196] Many online activist groups and projects approached Western audiences and became an alternative to mainstream media. Internet projects such as *Hear Palestine* or *Al Aqsa Intifada* presented many of the on-the-ground realities. Thus trans/local activism and trans/local internet mobilization *together* altered international and local political mobilization. This mattered even more because, as Gill Scott-Heron said: the revolution will (needs to) be "live"–result of on-the-ground organizing. Ethnographic research in Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon revealed how diaspora activists also participate in mobilization and campaigning. The question is how support by Palestinians in the diaspora is locally practiced, and who represented the different trans-national mobilizations on the World Wide Web. Furthermore, it will be illustrated how trans-national forms of mobilization are organized and experienced.

Local Political Mobilization

> I chatted with this woman from America, my friend helped with the [English] language. She was interested in Palestine and started visiting Palestinian chat rooms. We explained many things to her. Later she asked me how she could help, she wanted to send money to help people in Palestine. – Nazih, Beirut

Support for Palestinians *dakhil* (inside, i.e., in Israel/OT) is strong in the camps of Lebanon. Besides many demonstrations, *biyut 'aza* (mourning rituals/gatherings) have been organized for victims (that they mostly don't know personally) in Palestine.

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[196] Daniel Sobelman, Haaretz 11/12/2001 *Chats with Hamas on the Net.* See also Chapter Five.

People that were not politically active and did not want to participate in demonstrations, joined the masses in the streets after the Intifada. Many sensed that the Intifada unified the refugees in the *ghurba* (diaspora) with the Palestinians in the *dakhil* (inside). As Samar from Shatila explains:

> I mainly talk about the situation there [in Palestine] with my Palestinian internet friends. I want to know how they organize and work, how they fight, if they have success, who else they are in touch with, if they are still ok.

Samar shows that at the time of the Intifada, politics were the primary motive to discover and exploit the internet. According to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) customers were especially interested in online news sites that provided last minute information about Palestine. It seemed as if people's feelings were pressed in a bottle, which the Intifada released, and could be partly channelled through the internet. The internet possibilities were being taken up by a part of society that had previously been excluded from public debates/organizing.

Whether the internet is also used for mass, and on the ground, mobilization in Palestine remained debatable. With roughly 10% penetration in 2002/03 in Palestine, there was no mass internet connectivity.[197] Although there was more space for anonymous communication, many political movements were labelled illegal by Israel and couldn't openly organize or mobilize. Open mobilization or announcements on the internet about political activities would have been unsafe; displaying logistics related to the struggle was considered 'political suicide'. But, as stated, there is another politics: politics in the sense of acquiring/disseminating information that enables Palestinians inside and outside to be politically active in their pursuit for justice. Thus despite the early lack of mass connectivity and Israeli monitoring, the grass-roots internet capacity endowed it with more political significance, especially in relation to political mobilization and censorship. The internet is not only about mobilizing people through petitions and email protests, but also an opportunity for people themselves to present and debate different political views about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and possible solutions. Political leaders in the camps regarded the use of internet as significant and called for joining the struggle with Palestine by using the net. Maqda of the al-Aqsa Brigade in Ein al-Hilwe camp considered the benefits to be greater; "My advice for Arab youth is to seek knowledge about the internet because it is a means of resistance to fight their enemy and at the same time an educational tool."

Abu Basel of the PLO in Bourj al-shamali camp made a similar point in the opening quote of this chapter. At his office in Bourj al-Shamali refugee camp in South Lebanon he regularly urged young refugees to fulfil their national duties. Abu Basel expressed the need to also convince the Arab world: "Before going into debates about the Israeli enemy, Arabs too should understand the Palestinian national struggle. The

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[197] Nevertheless, it had grown to around 20% in 2005 while it was merely 5% in 1999. This shows the great growths of internet use. See Chapter Two for a more comprehensive study on internet penetration rates.

Arab silence sometimes upsets us more than the Israeli oppression." For him, using the internet became part of that shared responsibility. But there were different interpretations. When I repeated the remarks made by Abu Basel in Bourj Shamali refugee camp concerning the "revolutionary potential of the internet for Palestinians" to 19-year-old Ahmed in Beirut, he was less enthusiastic. He told me, "I don't believe we can get real political change via the internet". After we talked for a while about his activities online I realised that, in his perception, 'political change' corresponded to a specific level of activism. He told me that "except for discussing and debating our cause, Palestinians can't be activists on the internet". This (narrow) understanding of activism ascribes a particular meaning to politics as leading to direct change. I asked him if discussing and debating the Palestinian cause as he does is a form of political resistance through mobilization? He stated that it was contributing to resistance, but is not the resistance itself. The discrepancy in this example illustrates the various ways of judging the role of the internet in the Palestinian movements that indeed need to be acknowledged.

Abu Rami of Fatah, also from Bourj al-Shamali camp, specifically encouraged the youth to reach out for Palestine and enter the net to get involve with the struggle, even if just by words. "I would even give the internet connection for free to those who want to attack Zionist websites". The political, 'patriotic', use of internet was momentarily fulfilled during our interview when Abu Basel saw an email message stating that lobby groups were mobilizing to elect Sharon as 'person of the year'. His aim was to start his own mobilization and emailed friends and contacts with the advice to vote for Arafat and to spread the message further. The different national/political sentiments I encountered among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are apparent in numerous ways. As illustrated in Chapter Four, one of the manifestations in cyberspace is the choice of nicknames and email addresses. Sometimes nicknames like the number 48, old village names like Safuri, or references to famous martyrs function as their virtual ID.[198] Refugee whiz kids spearheaded the cyber Intifada and also engaged in direct confrontations, for example through sharp debate on discussion lists.

The most common/feasible way for people outside Palestine to engage in the political process is in fact through moral support and solidarity. Many people told me they regret not being able to offer concrete help in Palestine, but that at least they could motivate them to continue the struggle. Sahar, coordinating an internet café in Bourj al-Barajne refugee camp, told me in 2003:

> When they contact us from Palestine and ask us what we are doing here, we tell them about people going out on demonstrations and such. You can feel it helps lift up their spirit. We know from our experience during the sieges here how it feels. One should do what he can; we offer them through the net what they lack from the media.

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[198] 48 comes from the year 1948 (al Nakba). Safuri is a village near Haifa that most of its inhabitants fled to eventually settle in Lebanon.

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon hardly ever communicated with Israelis before. So when it did happen through these online confrontations, there was great excitement. Shiraz in Shatila described her internet experience:

> I decided not to tell her that I am living in Lebanon, I wanted to leave the fear in her heart. Normally we can't feel strongly against them, when I watch the news on television I feel I can't do anything. But like this, on the internet, I feel like I am facing an Israeli myself.

One of the young guys in Shatila who also was engaged in internet debates could not believe that some Israelis actually agreed with his political views. "I use to say in chat rooms that I hate Jews because they are responsible for this war against us." But some online criticized him for his comments. "I contacted my [online] friends in Palestine and asked whether it's true that there are Jews [Israelis] who help the Palestinians, as they claim. They said there are some but not many, and that also there are Arab Jews."

Not everybody was intensely involved, mostly played their part by sending support messages. Online support and solidarity brought many people together. Anonymity and access to a global network intensified the meetings between local and global places, but also helped transcend physical and intellectual barriers between people and places previously sealed off from one another. Many of these online friends in the diaspora feel that it is not enough to only give moral support to Palestinians inside, that they must help to mobilize international support as well. Mohammed from Nahr al-Bared also used the internet to mobilize political support:

> We have a saying in Arabic – 'instead of cursing the darkness, light a candle'. Don't just stand in one place and blame everything and everyone for your conditions. If I managed to communicate with someone and informed him about our conditions or our cause, for me, this is an achievement.

The anonymity and access offered by chat via websites created these new information and communication methods, which made diasporic engagement through support an important phenomenon.

Supporting and Defending Palestine: 'Light a Candle'

Sometimes the consequences of the virtual private connections can become very real, particularly when virtual friends or lovers are injured or killed. When politics, communication, and technology merge, and time and space also fuse, peculiar events occur. 19-year-old Dali from Beirut once chatted with a friend in Palestine/Gaza. At that moment an incursion happened in Gaza. She described the experience in detail and while I listened it seemed as if she was there herself. At a certain point the chat connection between them broke because he had to leave the internet café due to the attacks. She then called him on his mobile from the telephone Central in the camp. By hearing sounds of shooting through the phone, she actually continued the virtual experience. This reminded me of something that took place two years before in

Ramallah. I was at an internet café for an interview appointment with the manager as described in Chapter Six. While I waited we were suddenly asked to log off and leave. From the noise of sirens and shootings it seemed that the clashes were taking place very nearby. I saw people running away from the direction where the Israeli army jeeps where coming from. Some people hiding in the street corners threw stones at the jeeps. Email and chat sessions ended abruptly because of the clashes in front of the IC and the customers had to rush out. I stayed behind with the employee while he shut off the computers. Many PC screens showed web pages and chat programs that were left behind; it could have just as well been the story of Dali in Beirut and her friend in Gaza.

These continuous contacts are important because Palestinians feel empowered when they discover that many others share their resentments and anger; they realize they are not alone. Trans-national support is important, both inside and outside. Mahmoud in Shatila camp in Beirut said:

> Its funny to see how other Palestinians are discussing on these rooms as well, I realize I'm not the only one doing this. There are still Palestinians who try to get our rights. Sometimes I tell them its good what they do. But usually I concentrate on somebody who doesn't know about us and try to convince them about our case and the truth.

Personal impact is even more significant for Palestinians that are isolated. When Palestinians inside the OT receive solidarity messages, it is a boost and helps them carry on for a while. Intisara Jouri from Askar refugee camp in Nablus was arrested after her brother was accused of being involved in a suicide operation. The IDF demolished the family house and assassinated a second brother. Intisara and her family were going to be expelled as part of a new transfer law. *Palestine Monitor* wrote a feature about Intisara in order to set up a solidarity campaign. Trish of *Palestine Monitor* told me:

> I helped Amnesty obtain information and the campaign group wanted the family address in order to organize letters of support. This would be impossible because the West Bank did not receive any post for two months. So we helped the family to open an email address for Intisara. It really matters to have a solidarity campaign by email, I have seen how much it means for people when others actually care and also express their support directly to them.

Such efforts and immediate appeals to evoke sympathy or express solidarity would have required far more organizing/coordinating before the internet. Some of the people also focus their effort on targeting the Arab world, as 16-year-old Hiba from Beirut and Mohammed from a Tripoli camp both stressed:

> It makes me feel stronger that we are united. Step-by-step, inshallah, we will liberate Palestine. We have lousy presidents who are like the Israelis. They are afraid of America. Most important is our dignity, what is happening in Palestine and Iraq is so humiliating. We are strong and if we are united we can beat them.

> We need to introduce our intellectual thinkers into the internet society and forums much more. I managed to draw a number of Arab people to my forum page by which I have achieved something for our cause. If reaching one person is an achievement, how about these 126 added now? In South Lebanon, Hizbollah and Palestinians kicked out the strongest army. The key is to work together, if not today, then tomorrow.

With these examples I don't claim that Palestinians are politicized all the time, or that the internet is only used for that purpose. Music, lifestyle, sport, and romance are favourite topics in online activities as discussed in Chapter Four. However, politics continuously shaped the style and discourse on the internet. 18-year-old Nahed from Beirut talked about his internet activities as if they were naturally part of his national duty:

> What is taken from us by force we should regain by force but we don't have any power. We have to make contact with the outside world because if they start their own resistance against their governments [that support Israel] we will be helped. Everyone has a responsibility and should be a part of the resistance. If everybody shares we can make a big difference. For us media is the best tool, and the internet the only effective weapon.

Beside the similarities, there was a discrepancy between the experiences of Palestinians in Jordan and Lebanon. Palestinians in Jordan were clearly connected to what was taking place not far away. At the beginning of the Intifada people demonstrated, organized fundraisers, and set up new solidarity committees. Rannia, a Palestinian in Jordan, recalls how Jordan responded to the Intifada:

> It was a shock for all. Everyone was stuck to the television. It was terrible when we saw Mohamed al-Durra. Amman was very sad, even the huge shopping malls only played sad music, while trendy cafes changed and art exhibitions activities were about or for Palestine. It was solidarity and sadness, but I was disappointed that nobody went as far as to challenge our government who is collaborating with the sufferings across the border.

The level of participation was different than what I saw in Lebanon. Political activism is not completely absent, but their expression of their activism definitely was. With Palestinians making up the majority of the population in Jordan, and since the country signed a peace treaty with Israel, it is no surprise that the political developments in Palestine/Israel are a serious worry to Jordan. Nevertheless, within the overall context, the internet helped organize some forms of activism in Jordan. A more 'soft' political example in which young Palestinians in Jordan could participate was the *Global Candle Light*, a united street vigil for Palestine that was coordinated through the internet. In March 2002, al-Awda sent an email appeal to light candles for Palestine in all cities of the world. Lighting a virtual candle for Palestine at least gave some sense of participation. This type of organizing was a common style. Yet, the experiences by some of the politically engaged Palestinians I interviewed in Jordan showed how difficult it is to participate in political campaigns, even the soft ones. The

Jordanian police could harass solidarity groups, even when it is as harmless as lighting a candle in the street. When they organized their local part of the worldwide vigil in downtown Amman, the police intervened. Rami told me about his experiences during student revolts at the university in Amman, sparked by the Intifada.

Internet was an important organizer, especially because political assembly was forbidden. And when they did organize protests the state sent in the army and basically crushed the protest and abused the protestors: "We wanted to express our solidarity, many of us are Palestinians, their message was 'this is not Palestine' and we were either beaten up or scared off".

Rannia, who was helping injured Palestinians in a Jordanian hospital as a volunteer, said she feels attached to her family in Palestine, more than she did before: "The injustice implemented on your people makes you more attached to the place. We had regular telephone contact and before we even visited each other, this is impossible now. I wasn't politically active before the Intifada, there is no leadership to guide or set up something anyway." Meetings with people like Rami and Rannia and visits to refugee camps made me realize the extent to which solidarity activists and political groups were not warmly welcomed in Jordan. As Rannia explained in Amman in 2003: "The demonstration in April 2002 in which we planned to march towards the Israeli embassy was crushed. The military sealed off the city and they announced via the media that is was an illegal demo. Of course many did go; I drove around with my mother because we tried to join the others. That was perhaps the last big attempt to organize grass-roots protest in Jordan."

It was clear that some of the youth were passionate and wanted to do something, but felt trapped because they were not allowed to. The problem according to some was the lack of experience. Many of the former activists/leaders were not in Jordan anymore because of the political turmoil between Palestinians and the Jordanian state. Rannia explained it best when she said:

> We are raised in Jordan to learn information based on what the Americans want. The lack of national/political interests is mainly because we don't know what should be done and in what way to change the situation. With the defeatist ideas imposed on us we ended up in a political depression; so I guess they succeeded. For example, the boycott campaign was sort of a successful campaign, but it was mostly based on spontaneous motivations and wasn't sustained. We don't have activist leaders.

Beside the lack of political organizers, there is also a more direct and related problem, as the owner of the popular IC *Books@Café* in Amman put it bluntly: "We know we will get smashed". In this context, internet activism opens doors to other political expressions. Rather than the internet diminishing traditional forms of political activity, it combines traditional with new political activity. As Adam told me in 2001 during one of the first interviews back in Palestine:

> It's important to always put in perspective that it is a tool, not an end in itself, and that it can't substitute for on-the-ground activity of real

> movements…. In the end it is local mobilization through mouth-to-mouth, posters, factions, so the internet is not used instead of clashes and demonstrations. But it helps indirectly because television and internet images mobilize anger and motivation.

And Sam Bahour argued:

> (…) internet indirectly reaches a larger number of people. You can use the net by printing a communiqué and stick it on the wall in a café or mosque. Internet can in other words be used for organizing the political effort itself. Political parties and election campaigns benefit the most. To reach the other 95% of the populous, we need to use other tools…

Beside these different examples of experimenting with internet to organize support from the Palestinian diaspora, other consequences of the fusing between internet and political activism were the successful trans-national debates.

…But It Will Be Virtualized: Trans-national Mobilization

> What Israel has depended on in the past, the ignorance, complicity, or laziness of journalists outside Israel, is now countered by the fantastic amount of alternative information available on the internet. … Here as in many other instances, reliable information is the greatest enemy of oppression and injustice." (Said 2001:41)

Online trans-national mobilization motivated debates about new strategies and tactics in protest and solidarity movements. At the start of the Intifada in September 2000 the telecommunication firm AT&T agreed to host Israel's army (IDF) website. *Al Awda*, which was regarded as one of the best projects concerning Palestinian refugees and human rights in the US, responded by urging all its supporters to protest by switching telephone providers from AT&T to ATX. One of my first encounters with Palestinian internet activism was the appeal against AT&T and was forwarded to me by several people, even though I had no relation to this American company. In response to al-Awda, pro-Israel organizations in the US in turn threatened to boycott ATX because it hosted the *Al Awda* website. This battle was probably the first example of activist style mobilization before hundreds of other boycott and internet-based tactics emerged. The above quote by Edward Said captures a sense of relief and signifies the first reactions of the impact of the internet.

It became obvious that the Palestine-Israeli conflict was not just a military war. The outbreak of the Intifada forced Palestinian organizations and activists to regroup and, especially in the diaspora, rethink their tactics. One of the issues all participants agreed upon was a serious reform of Palestinian public relations. A grass-roots battle against the pro-Israel biased media erupted. Whereas activists have limited access to mainstream (televized) media as Gill Scott Heron sang, the internet technology now gives an alternative medium to air factual and live coverage. Many joined the media activism, targeting the international community. *Solidarity Design,* for example, offered free internet service to those dedicated to increase the Palestinian

presence on the web "So that the world could better understand the realities of the Palestinian situation".

The 'Western' audience is the ultimate target because they are considered to play a significant role in influencing their own governments. During interviews in Lebanon in 2003, an internet user in Nahr al-Bared told me: "to win their hearts is to win the control over the economic and military plug that feeds Israel." Websites that presented government spending and support for Israel, and linked them to economic cuts and privatizations were attempts to shift public opinion. Abu Rami from Bourj Shamali camp in Southern Lebanon said:

> The American voter and taxpayer should know that his money goes to Israel. This while many of them live in bad economic conditions and African Americans suffer harsh racism themselves. They are more aware now.

If there used to be predominantly *one* way of thinking about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict before, the internet offered more alternatives. One of the first internet activists in Palestine, Nigel Parry reformulated Gil Scott-Heron's text into "The revolution will not be televized, but it will be virtualized" (1999). Parry was referring to the potential new space for political dissent in the context of the 1996 clashes mentioned before. University volunteers like him offered daily online updates of a city that was completely besieged. The experiences revolutionized their view and gave birth to several projects afterwards. This did not mean a total turnover in the ICT status, as Sam Bahour explained: "As an IT person I would like to add high tech but in reality, under this crises and poverty, ICT is not the tool for organization or mobilization."

The International Solidarity Movement, a movement committed to resisting Israeli occupation, integrated the different levels of cyber politics. One of ISM's leading organizers was eventually denied entry by Israel twice. As it happened, we were both thrown over the border into Jordan in the same week. We met for an interview and talked about ISM. The internet was clearly crucial for him: "We definitely wouldn't have been here without it. (…) The website is a source to others and it shows people what occupation is in daily life". The primary tools of internet for ISM came down to recruit and mobilize, publicize and coordinate, and share and negate.

Adam explained that mobilization for the first two campaigns of ISM in Palestine was mostly via the internet; i.e., email lists and websites. ISM tried to coordinate its campaign simultaneously with events around the world via the internet. The ISM support groups in different countries, with their own local ISM websites, played an especially important role. The main ISM website was also used for multiple purposes, showing photos and video uploads of events in the Occupied Territories. Thus an important part of the ISM trainings is how to deal with the media and increasing solidarity. According to Adam:

> Everybody comes to Palestine already equipped by these trainings. We try not to use the term 'human shield' for example. It has a negative

> connotation and we don't want to use that terminology because we are
> defending 'human rights' while in the media they write we act 'as human
> shields for terrorists' in order to use it against us.

By 2003 the ISM had recruited over 1500 people from all-over the world, mostly from US, UK, EU, Canada, and South Africa, from the ages of 20 to 70. The movement emphasized peaceful intentions and non-violent activism on their website by. for instance, sending out an international call to join the biannual harvest of olives in order to both help families generate money during the economic crisis and to protect/witness the olive trees that were uprooted and the Palestinians attacked during olive picking. ISM was also clear on a-religious and non-violence civil disobedience, such as acting as human shields when protecting Palestinians, several times with fatal results (see Epilogue). Nevertheless, the Jewish Action Taskforce (JAT) dedicated a special section against ISM, referring to ISM as supporters of terrorism. JAT still aimed at emphasizing ISM as violent and as having destructive intentions by making associations between ISM and Islamic Jihad.

ISM managed to counter such accusations by providing updated reports and pictures of their events through the internet and often invited the international press (for example those representing the news from their country) to join them during their activities. The internet as an organizing tool showed to be very effective according to many pro-Palestinian activists I interviewed. They would not have succeeded in reaching international mobilization without the internet. The combination of offline activism and street mobilization had a successful impact. Many of the activities also took place in the Arab context.

Regional Mobilization: Arab Protest

The Intifada sparked the sympathy of many Arabs. Aloush from Jordan explained how the Intifada awakened a spirit of rebellion in Arab streets: "Whether in terms of peace with Israel or in succumbing to dictates of the WB and IMF, it got back the vitality it missed for 25 years". Aloush, producer of *Arab Nationalist* mailing list and *Free Arab Voice* website, extensively uses the internet for political purposes, especially as a *counter*-public voice. The *Free Arab Voice* website initially grew slowly but following developments in the region after 9/11 many visitors and subscribers joined. "When it exceeded a certain level, they [Israeli intelligence] began to think of shutting us down. On May 15th, actually the anniversary of Israel's Independence day and our Nakba, they finally did shut us down."

Arabization and easier technical possibilities expanded his audiences in the Arab world. Aloush claims to represent more Arab critical analyses unfiltered by Arab regimes or softened as spokespersons in the West. He doesn't wish to moderate his political opinion: "The internet is a new tool that allows our message to be sent across the world. We can't do the same through the *Washington Post* for example, except for

the very few that are themselves part of the American establishment and understand the system, such as Edward Said, or Rachid Khalidi."

At the time of our interviews in 2003 in Jordan, he had just been released. "During the interrogations, they also mentioned and asked me about my activities on the net." Aloush was expelled from the university where he taught on charges of having addressed students at a public antiwar rally: "I urged them to join the battle against imperialism because Iraq just was the beginning of other Arab countries being sold." His own relation with Jordan has seen many transformations. In 1967 his family fled from Palestine to Jordan; in 1970 they fled from Jordan to Lebanon after the Black September war; in 1982 they fled from Lebanon after Israeli invasion and the civil war. After having lived and worked in different countries he returned to Jordan. He therefore pointed at the importance of critical analyses. For him this means that political activism for Palestine needs to go beyond the Palestinian national level. The Intifada sparked increasing activism in the region, strengthening solidarity with Palestine. In Jordan, this level of activism was low, but in Lebanon the protests and activities were very present.

This is related to the political social history of Lebanon and its own battles with Israel. As a 28-year-old activist in Beirut, Bassem had a lot of experience with organizing protest against Israeli oppression but also against the Lebanese political repression. Palestinians are often treated as scapegoats for many of the domestic problems. One of the spaces of protest he and his comrades were involved with was the internet. But for him it is in particular the Arab context that forces activists to be more challenging in their analyses of the internet:

> We must go beyond mere communication. Reconnecting Palestinians relieved a lot of frustration, it allowed phone and email connection for Palestinians in Lebanon and that is important. Internet has made Palestinians visible online, before they were invisible in legal and social terms. The internet gave stateless and contested people a form of identity or legitimacy, like an email address and online national identity. Politics needs to be more than this.

On the role of activists and a broadly based resistance he pointed at the international character of a Palestinian struggle. For Bassem: "The liberation of Palestine can't only be achieved by the Intifada in the OT, it has to be done regionally and internationally." That is why, besides internal communication, it is more meaningful to start communicating and organizing *together* within the Lebanese societies. The *War of Words* I mentioned before, and the *trans-national mobilization* discussed here, now come together. Activists realize the importance and prepare themselves to deal with the media through grass-roots training. Next I examine other types of participation used by internet activists in the *Cyber Intifada* by discerning two expressions of political internet activism: political confrontations and direct attacks.

7.4 Virtual Stones

> But the keyboard might allow you to reach places that a stone can't.
>
> – Hacktivist in Beirut, Lebanon

There are several forms of online activism, but convincing the outside world of the Palestinian plight through trans-national mobilization was the most common goal. Internal/Palestinian solidarity and support marked much of the local mobilization. In this section I consider the more radical activism that aims at hitting and attacking the opponent directly. As the third form of collective tactics of the pro-Palestinian Cyber Intifada. There are politics with a small 'p' and Politics with a capital 'P'.

"Pro-Israel hackers told to ignore 'cyber terror." – The front-page title of an article in Israeli daily Haaretz explained that an IT company finally launched the 'Checkpoint Software Technology' promising protection from 'internet terrorist attacks'.[199] One web development firm even tried to conceal the Israeli identity of its clients by the websites taking on a US disguise.[200] The tone in this and many other articles suggested that Palestinians and Israelis were engaged in an intense cyber war. General Security Services, also known as the secret service *Shin Bet,* went as far as presenting a national pact to fight 'Cyber Terror'.[201] This is not always *media hype*, however. The internet can be an organizing *tool*, a public *voice*, or a more straightforward *weapon*. They aim for two things: changing political perceptions about the conflict, and/or organizing direct action.

Mohamed al-Dura Hackers, *PalHackers Club*, and al-*Moghtarekin al-Arab* ('*Arab Penetrators'*) are some of the hacktivist groups in which Palestinians work. But does the above quote by one of the Palestinian hacktivists I met in a Lebanese refugee camp represent one of these 'cyber terrorists'? My curiosity about what it is that encouraged him to engage in such activities resulted in a irritable reply by a hacktivist in Tripoli: "And so what should I do when I see an Israeli message online saying 'we wont spare one Palestinian'? Anyway, who is the cause of us here being homeless, against our will? Come on! It's worth the effort."

As an alternative form of resistance by Palestinian internet users, direct action on the internet is more of an option for refugees in the diasporas that are not able to participate in the physical struggle. Many of the young refugees I met in Lebanon were not convinced that debating with others is enough. Whereas for Shiraz, confronting and debating Pro-Israelis or disseminating opinions in support of Palestinians was satisfying, others preferred political expressions in virtual battles through computer games. Some thought it was time to step outside the virtual realms of Intifada games; they joined hacker groups to cause harm to online Israeli targets.

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[199] Hausman Tamar, 23/03/2001 Haaretz, article number 871713
[200] Dror Yuval, 10/11/2000 Haaretz, article number 851703
[201] Catherine Cohen, 25/09/2000 Haaretz, article number 864409

Confronting the Enemy

> His point of view was based on the Israeli side of the story. When he said 'Why don't you accept them [Israelis] and just live in peace?' I answered 'Shouldn't I be in my homeland first to make this possible? You know: be together to live together; instead of being in a refugee camp here?' Whenever I manage to correct the wrong image or improve our point, especially with Americans, I feel happy! – Safa, Ein al-Hilwe

Safa's and others' attempts to convince can lead to a sense of relief if not 'anger management'. Yet the need to *persuade* sometimes runs over into the wish to *confront*. On the question who they like to chat with in particular, many of the interviewed ended up with a similar description: After Palestinians, Israelis were the most favourite internet contacts. Some changes did appear as this quote about a debate between an Israeli and Palestinian woman in a mIRC chat room portrays. These examples do not suggest that the internet is a neutral public sphere where everyone is welcome to express and share ideas with the same potential impact. Abu Basel tried to explain to me why the struggle over (Western) audience means so much to him:

> We should convince the audience there is another side of the story. They [Israelis] invade the media with the history of the Jews, the Jewish state… should we leave the websites for the Zionists? We must also talk about the Palestinian cause, how we were forced to leave our homes. We have to clarify the picture. These ideas must reach everyone, also the Israelis.

Cyber tactics can eventually bypass online barriers. Mahmoud, on the internet almost everyday, became used to such measures. But he had recently found a way to circumvent bans from forums.

> I don't have a favourite room anymore because I'm kicked out from most of them. Sometimes I get so angry and enter an Israeli one and write 'no more Israel, Palestine forever'. So they kick me out but now I always try to go back. But after they kick you out their program recognizes your computer IP and won't allow you to enter. But there is a program that can remove the bans and kicks and allows you to sneak in again. I also have this program now.

Many of the confrontations concerned a battle over arguments, but there are also those, mostly teenage boys, who use the net as a virtual *battlefield*. The combat games have to be seen as a form of defiance, although it is a game and no real people are involved. By identifying oneself as a stone thrower, the player is at least a virtual activist for a moment. A good example of this type of virtual Intifada are the stone throwing games where Palestinian activists fight Israeli soldiers, like the Taht al-Ramad (Underash) game (Picture 13). Although far from being one of the heroic Palestinian shabab (youth) in the Occupied Territories that defined the image of the Intifada, being part of a *cyber* army that attacks Israeli targets is probably as close as anyone can get to being directly involved in the physical political battle.

Shaker is a regular user of *Underash*: "There are many combat games about Bin Laden, Arafat, or Saddam. You can choose to be Bush but most choose to catch Bush. I played one where Arafat was trapped in his compound." A Syrian publishing house designed this video game about the Palestinian uprising in order to turn Arab children away from popular American video games featuring US soldiers killing Iraqis or Afghans. More than 10.000 copies (cost: 8 US dollars each) were sold in one month. Mahmoud: "Intifada games are exciting; you feel the need to finish all the levels in order to enter the battle. It feels like being there and throwing the stones yourself. When the battle is inside the Aqsa Mosque you can help the injured to escape … you feel you **have** to kill the soldier." But Akram, owner of an internet café in a camp in Beirut was a bit more down to earth and made the point that it wasn't really the game itself, but what it represented, that mattered. "Take Counter Strike, now that's a game, but in *Taht al-Ramed* you throw a stone three times at the soldier and you are dead."[202]

Some of those involved in the virtual warfare were also involved in other political forms of cyber activism. When attempts to use the internet to convince or negotiate seem to fail and direct attacks are the aim, the internet becomes a 'weapon' rather than a tool. This refers to a *cyber war* concept whereby pro- Israel and pro-Palestinian groups attack each other with viruses, hacking, and other internet-related sabotage.

Attacking the Enemy: Hacktivism

In August 2001 I received several emails with Palestinian URLs such as Miftah.org or popac.org (referring to well-know establishments in Ramallah, such as the Popular Art Centre). These links were fake and contained viruses and were sent by pro-Israeli hackers. A hacker is generally someone who breaks into computer systems with programs that the hackers design and/or share with each other. A rebellious character is true in many cases, especially in their mode of operation, but can stand for oppressive or authoritarian values of as well. Besides the association to criminality, hackers are commonly associated with egalitarian/rebellious values.[203]

Hacking has become a threat with a potential power to hit anyone, anywhere, as several reports attested.[204] Cyber attacks have been debated by the media since the new millennium; the Pentagon exaggeratedly called it the 'Next Pearl Harbor'.[205] As in real life politics, espionage and show of force are major components

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[202] Counter Strike is a popular network game in which the player acts as a terrorist force. Taht al-Ramed means *Under the Ashes* and is an Intifada game.

[203] It is not my aim to trace the epistemological source of the term *hacking* or *hackers* here, but rather to describe how and why Palestinian hackers organize themselves.

[204] Several reporters received the telephone numbers of many American celebrities: hackers had crashed into AOL Instant Messaging screens and stole the mobile phone account of Hollywood celebrity Paris Hilton and spread all phone numbers of Hilton's celebrity friends on the internet. *Database Hackers Reveal Tactics*, by Kim Zetter, May 25, 2005. www.wired.com.

[205] James Der Derian *Virtuous war/virtual theory* in International Affairs 76, 4 (2000) 771-788

in cyber battles. Much of these hypes have decreased by now, but from time to time we are witness to spectacular cases. Unsurprisingly, Israeli computer specialists are considered the worlds' best, as also acknowledged by many of the Palestinian IT specialists I interviewed. When a state of the art ICT sector and the best military intelligence in the world come together, a high quality hack context is the result. Several cases signify how *real* the consequences of hacking can be.[206]

Bunt (2003) asserts that parts of these online activisms are primarily practiced in the name of Islam, and highly international. The internet activities, labelled by Bunt as *Electronic-Jihad,* predominantly relate to conflicts in Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir, and Afghanistan (2003:26). Though Islam certainly plays a role, the internet consumers and producers I met in Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon expressed their reasons for participating and offering solidarity with Palestine in terms of a(collective) national cause. Moving away from the Jihad paradigm,[207] I would therefore rather define this online activism *Cyber Intifada*, i.e. an uprising using electronic means as the dominant instrument.

These hacktivists can be considered political activists on the internet. They are usually young and technologically very savvy. Their work often consists of website defacements, online graffiti, textual postings, and pictures of atrocities. The Intifada triggered a frenzy of political defacements, postings of pro-Israel or pro Palestinian messages, and attacks on ISPs. US and Israeli websites are the most notable victims of pro-Palestinian hackers. News about Arab or Muslim hackers received substantial press coverage at the time because they were seen as 'unusual'; this patronizing assumption has at times worked in the hacker's favour. It indicates why some of the targets of pro-Palestinian hacking did not have adequate defence mechanisms for their databases and servers (Bunt 2003:37). A famous online battle was the one by notorious hacker *Doctor Nucker*, when he targeted the AIPAC (the American Israel Political Action Committee (along with the National Rifle Association the most powerful lobby in the United States) website and put pictures of Palestinian victims as his signature. The case got high publicity because he also obtained AIPAC's 3, 500 secured members email list, including 700 credit card accounts, which he then published online (Bunt: 46).

Conversely, Arab and Muslim sites are also targeted by pro-Israeli hacktivists. The Lebanese Hizbollah operated its own server in 2002 because their previous provider was continuously attacked and blocked. The many diversions of Hamas-related websites to pornography by pro-Israeli hackers are well known as well. When President Arafat died the opening page of a Palestinian information site was blocked by a series of fake pictures ridiculing Arafat. But non-radical websites are also targeted. Involving oneself with Israeli websites through hacking caused debates on

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[206] An Israeli company hired a hacker to hack the computers of competitors and steal their contract deals, consumer details, and even spy on customers. This example was one of the biggest scandals in industrial espionage in Israel. *Israëli's Nap Computer Spies*, May 29 2005. www.wired.com

[207] As I argued in Chapter Five, referring to *Jihad* is problematic as the term is commonly associated with terrorism and Islamophobic discourses equating Jihad to suicide bombings.

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whether it is ethically appropriate for Muslims. The disputes even led to an online fatwa by Sheikh Faisal Mawlawy of the *Islamic European Fatwa Council*. He gave permission to visit secular as well as Zionist websites as an 'information gathering exercise' and allowed hacktivist activities but only "as an answer to an attack" (Bunt 2003:46).

The number of hackers is difficult to measure. According to hackerthreats.com more than 500, 000 had been identified in 2004, but they were not necessarily politically motivated. Yet, when something takes place as significant as 11/9, the outbreak of the intifada, or the war on Iraq, an explosion of politically driven defacements occur. It seemed important for hackers to be mentioned by other hackers and to be listed on hack sites. *Digitalgansters.com* is a site where hackers can trade information about their work (Taggart 2001). The pro-Palestinian hack group *WFD* was notorious for its hacks on *.il* (Israel) domains with a high profile. One spectacular act was the replacement of Sharon's election website with a flash movie with text, music, and pictures of the Intifada. The participation in clashes via special Intifada websites or through sabotaging websites by hacktivists presents a certain *virtual* participation.

Some of the individuals behind Palestinian hacker projects are from refugee camps. I heard about the *'Mohamed al-Dura Hackers'* during interviews and after a while I tracked them. Two of the participants in this group and several other hackers talked about their motivations and methods. A Palestinian hacker from South Lebanon:

> For us the internet is not just for fun. We have a cause. During the Intifada, while our people were resisting and being killed, there was a similar Intifada on the net. More than 200 Israeli sites were destroyed during the first three months of the Intifada.[208]

They explained how they also receive the names of some Israeli websites from internal sources in Palestine. I asked if they did not consider it useless compared to the actual on-the-ground battles in Palestine: "Both ways are true, the meaning of the keyboard or stone is the same for me. But the keyboard might allow you to reach places that a stone can't." The al-mukhtariqin al-'Arab (Arab Penetrators) had 161 member hackers in 7 countries at the time of the interview the hacker described to me his routine: "Usually on Monday, at 6.30 PM, we meet online to organize attacks. We had a successful operation against the site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The targeted site would be offline for at least one day or even more, depending on its webmasters." It is not difficult to grasp the motivations behind their work as hackers, especially those in the diaspora. A Palestinian hacker from the North of Lebanon:

> I lost my father after he wasted ten years of his life in a horrible Israeli

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[208] Al Manar, closely linked to Hezbolah, established a television station in 1996. It launched a website in the same year but due to its success it had to add a new website address at the end of 2000 to accommodate the large number of users. They frequently find themselves at the frontline of cyber battles between pro and anti Israeli hackers. They are deprived of advertising revenues by American companies like Microsoft and amazon.com because of ties with Hizbolah. In Gonzales, 2001; in the 2006 war between Lebanon and Israel the IDF bombed Al Manar as a "terrorist" target.

prison. Can I forget what Israel did to my father? The one who now sees Israelis destroy his house also cannot forget. The next generations cannot forget what happened, that is what I am working on.

Different IPs are used when the hacktivists prepare an attack. A member of the *Mohammed al-Dura* hacker group works from a local internet café. It is easy for him and his comrades to gather this way; when they receive the URL name of a target to be hit, they send each other a missed call as a sign to assemble. Depending on the internet connection speed and the aimed target, the operation itself takes no more than an hour.

As websites are monitored, safety measures are important. *Haganah.org* is a pro-Israeli website that lists Arab/Muslim websites that support Palestinians. A year before our meeting, the hacker I met was hacked himself. He argues that his website was destroyed because of the subjects discussed on his forum or because he was simply tracked down as one of the hactivists:

> Recovery was very difficult. I first worked non-stop to fix the damage and save what was lost. The site is complete again and also the forums are activated. When I was hacked I felt a big challenge: 'To be or Not to be' – to exist as a website and get it back again or not.

One of the hackers I interviewed belonged to a group that received many of their targets from Palestine, they don't randomly target; Israeli peace groups were, for example, exempted. He described how their activity is usually organized:

> They inform my cousin who then informs me that we have a mission. We usually sit together in the same place at the same time to damage the target as much as possible because with four pcs we have more power. We surf to the site afterwards and if we find a note saying that the server is unavailable we know that we destroyed it. But it must be an Israeli site that is hostile to Palestinians.

Concurrently, there is a certain lack of interest among internet producers/initiatives inside Palestine in hacktivism because, contrary to online/virtual obstacles or internet attacks, the experiences of offline/on-the-ground attacks were more important. According to 'Abdi, an organizer at ABP in Ramallah:

> Hacking is not the main threat to us, invasion is. The physical dangers are more of a concern than the virtual ones because our 'host' is not something external [indirect/virtual], sow we can be directly attacked.

Incidentally, this also answers the discrepancy in the politics of hyper-linking (Chapter Five) that is shaped by avoiding undesirable associations. Thus, in this context, for many in Palestine, the internet is not the primary location where battles take place. This recalls the difference between inside and outside tactics, showing a division in resistance against military oppression through (non- and/or violent) direct action and resisting misconceptions about Palestinians through media/cyber activism. The later, unsurprisingly, takes place more in the diaspora for the simple fact that they

are not at the 'centre of gravity'. And in addition, the (Western) diaspora more often has access to trans-national mediums to target international (Western) audiences.

Internet Guerrilla

The internet does sometimes facilitate direct/offline resistance that some people do become engaged with. Being dissatisfied with the struggle or feeling detached from it are common denominators, and in many activities there are different ways one can fight, from arguing to attacking and hacking. Chatting was a way to trap the opponent. At the beginning of the Intifada, a Palestinian student used chat rooms to get in touch with Israelis. After knowing each other better, she started a more personal relationship with him online. The Israeli fell in love and he agreed to meet her. She picked him up, but as soon as they drove towards Ramallah he was kidnapped and killed. The girl was sentenced for life in an Israeli prison.[209]

Apparently, the internet has also been at the centre of guerrilla activism. There had also been rumors that groups outside Palestine were coordinating underground resistance via internet. One of the main newspapers in Lebanon headlined *'Al Aqsa cells being funded and guided from Ein al-Hilwe, commander using internet to direct attacks'*.[210] The commander running the cell was a veteran Fatah activist during the Israeli-Lebanese war but split in 1993 in response to the Oslo agreement and formed the *Black September 13th* faction.[211]

He welcomed me in his South Lebanese refugee camp office and showed me how he used the internet to help the *al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade* in the West Bank. His own *Kataeb al-Awda* (*Brigades of Return*) is one of the cells in South Lebanon that is part of a wider web of Palestinian resistance making use of the new internet technology. As Blanford described, this trans-national participation comes down to co-organising military attacks on Israeli targets by transferring money and military advice from Lebanon to the West Bank. The commander's group helped coordinate the cells in the West Bank via the internet by using his experience of guerrilla tactics in the Lebanese civil war Israeli sieges. I asked him why he values the internet and maintains their *Kataebaqsa.org* website. The answer was the same as one of the internet initiators in Ramallah gave me two years earlier:

> Need is the mother of all choices. … The net is an important means of communication between Palestinians in and outside, as well as for the resistance. It is used for all our necessary activities: organizing, recruiting, training, and setting up cells. It allows me to work on all of these aspects as if I am in Palestine.

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[209] This attempt was repeated by a young Palestinian two years later. When the second anniversary of the Intifada was commemorated, she did almost the exact same operation. A planned chat and email friendship, followed by a kidnap. The operation failed because Israeli intelligence detected her attempts and so she was arrested.

[210] Nickolas Blanford, Daily Star, 4 July 2003

[211] On this date in 1993 Arafat signed the Oslo deal, considered by many as a first step to capitulation of the most important Palestinian principles.

A Pro-Israeli hack group (also called *Haganah)[212]* attacked the *Kataeb Aqsa* website several times, but for him it is customary that Israeli intelligence or hackers target them. "Each time we are attacked we just rebuild the site, and we use methods of transmitting encrypted codes and instructions". Working from a small office in a busy area of the camp hampered the service even more. After I stayed for a while to watch him work, it was obvious how basic assets can make a world of difference. With a laptop on his small desk, the phone connection, and, in case that gets disconnected, the satellite cables, he was updating the communiqués and checking for messages from Palestine. He said:

> Thanks to the internet there is a huge difference in terms of communication between the First Intifada and this Intifada, mainly the speed to exchange and direct instructions by our leaders. Even in a refugee camp we can now use such accessible techniques.

The examples in this chapter entail a repositioning of the practices by Palestinian internet users and shows how politics are exercised, constituted, and reinforced. Thus, with the internet hegemonic power structures can be ignored, negated, or shattered, as Landzelius (2002:40) argues. Cyber Intifada represents a new form of grass-roots agency that is being constructed within a broader context while intersecting with newer practices of everyday life.

7.5 Conclusion

Over the last five years internet access has become an important instrument for Palestinians; besides helping overcome isolation or fragmentation, internet was significant for progressive activism. In this chapter I presented the important ways Palestinians and pro-Palestinian solidarity activists try to achieve political demands via the internet. I dealt with the final tension that shows the dialectics between resistance and solidarity on one hand, and occupation and repression on the other, a continuous juxtaposition in Palestinian everyday life. I argued that internet activism is not a surrogate for offline and everyday resistance. Technological developments and internet use *asserts* but also *contests* political and capitalist authoritarianism. In fact, this dual power is what makes the internet so unique. Three methods of *Cyber Intifada* political internet use were distinguished: as a public relation tool to convince international audiences (media activism), to recruit activists and organize for local and global protests (mobilization), and internet as a weapon to hack (attack).

The *first* section stated how for initiatives like *Electronic Intifada, al-Awda, Palestine Media Watch,* and *Free Palestine,* ICT development offered a new form of political representation and meant an important step in the attempt to narrate a

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[212] *Haganah* means 'defence' in Hebrew but also relates to the Haganah militia Jewish armed forces remembered for terrorizing Palestinian civilians out of their villages in 1947/48.

Palestinian perspective. Confirmed by collective participation in different levels of mobilization and resistance, political internet usage in diasporic and occupied settings also contributed in reconstructing the relationship between Palestinian diasporas. The examples furthermore answered the question whether, and *how*, the internet serves political activists in solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada. Where nations and minorities are oppressed and weak, they rely even more on solidarity.

In the *second* section I showed that Palestinians have to mobilize beyond their own settings to persuade and reach the international world and convince them to join in their struggle. Email and websites increase communication between individual activists and activist movements, locally and internationally. Beside the 'official' structures, different methods of mobilization have involved local communities and international activists. Online and offline ethnography reveal that internet is part of a wider process of self-empowerment.

The *third* section analyzed how Palestinians managed to use internet technology as a tool within their repertoires, as a tactical instrument or a *weapon for the weak*. The presence of trans-national hacktivist networks and the growing popularity of websites by al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and Hamas highlight the dialectic relation between resistance and internet development.

It is also necessary to be clear about the different power-related factors, the political economic structures involved, and the inequalities. I do not end with euphoric conclusions because as this chapter shows, the internet is not considered a substitute for everyday face-to-face politics. Bearing in mind the US support of and European compliance with Israeli occupation, equating Cyber Intifada and internet activism with anti-colonial struggle or grass-roots resistance is rather problematic. It is important to remain clear about the difference between on- and offline mobilization in the political arena. Many Palestinian users, banned parties of underground militants and stateless refugees are forced to organize outside the confines of 'official' politics. Emails and websites help to motivate, but personal debates and face-to-face conversations are crucial. This is especially true concerning defence of a controversial stance or participation in risky activities; people are more likely to be (finally) mobilized to join a movement or protest via offline affiliation and persuasion. This leads increasingly to a definition of the internet as both a blessing and a curse, or in other words, an instrument that can force people into submission *and* help them to rise up. I will participate in this final debate in the next chapter.

Chapter 8: Online and Offline Resistance— Conclusions and Discussions

8.1 Introduction

The presence of post-Oslo returnees in the Occupied Palestinian Territories marked the birth of a professionalized ICT sector in Palestine in the late nineties, not long before the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000 would have an enormous impact on Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and Diaspora. This fusion continued during the aftermath of 9/11; the internal Palestinian political landscape was in great turmoil after the death of President Yasser Arafat in 2004, and the subsequent collapse of Fatah and election victory of Hamas. Along with this turmoil, between 2001-2005 internet usage increased and political uprisings erupted. The timing and location of this research, therefore, corresponded with a new historical phase.

Since the 1990s an amalgam of research on the impact of the internet has been produced, as shown by the increase of empirical and theoretical propositions discussed in Chapter One. Several of the academic contributions focused on the practices of political protest and mobilization, and suggested that 'new' media replaced 'old' styles of resistance. Empirical research about the social and political impact of the internet between 2001 and 2005 in Palestine and the diaspora formed a unique chance to build on these studies and examine the practices of internet usage in everyday life. When the Palestinian Intifada erupted, it dramatically shook the trans-national Palestinian communities, and 9/11 further changed the region. Early analyses of the situation corresponded with a familiar cult of spontaneity, romanticizing an amorphous-style of activism that signified a postmodern trend in Cultural Studies. However attractive this spirit may seem in general, it did not match with the hardcore realities of war and state oppression in the region.

The harsh political realities also corrected some of my premature propositions about the political impact of the internet. In light of these conditions, it is difficult to rely on loosely connected global *networks* and underestimate the significance of nation-states. Also, abstract analyses of empire and multitude as forms of resistance can be problematic. Fenton (2003, 2005) shows that in order to be successful we need a collective understanding of a common goal or strategy. While we need to consider 'the everyday' in research analyses, Scheper-Hughes (1999) made the important point that everyday resistance sometimes actually means everyday survival. Similarly, Bayat (1997, 1998) showed that we should not be too generous with ascribing 'resistance,' and offers a more refined view of different forms of movement and struggle.

The assessment about the impact of the internet is part of the three *tensions* I studied: mobility-immobility, resistance-oppression, and space-place. I start this chapter by outlining the main conclusions as shaped by the preceding chapters and

follow the structure of the three tensions. Based on the research questions, in the second section I sketch an overall evaluation of the positive and negative impacts of internet for protest movements. This dialectic approach was crucial for two reasons. Firstly, the reality of Palestinian occupation shows that even though the internet plays a supportive role, it cannot replace the face-to-face organisation and centrality of political struggle against (colonial) oppression in everyday life. However, the benefits of the internet should not be underestimated either, and deserve thorough analyses. This was, ultimately, the overriding argument in the research. As I stated in Chapter Two, we need to move beyond the general utopian/dystopian discourse that has sometimes shaped internet research. I therefore consider the internet to be a *blessing and a curse.* Before addressing that dynamic, I turn to the general objectives that were outlined in Chapter One, i.e. the role of internet in creating transnational Palestinian linkages/imageries and local and transnational activism through the internet.

8.2 Re-considering the Three Tensions

Because of the barriers to communication imposed by the political context, the birth of the internet entailed a major transformation of communication and access to information. Internet usage began to have a local impact on the biased representation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Rather than merely identifying direct, statistical levels of ICT penetration to measure its effect, I also link internet development to economic and political independence. The presence of the PNA and takeover of (part of) the telecom infrastructure after Oslo had an immediate and positive impact on ICT development and internet utilisation. The stories of my encounters in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine capture the first reactions and signify the novelty of internet at the time I started my fieldwork. Though by now the internet has become more 'normalised' the case studies nevertheless show what internet may mean for a context that is marked by Palestinian struggle for political self-determination and everyday survival. Furthermore, throughout this project, the importance of mass electronic media developments has been shown to be particularly significant for the Palestinian diaspora.

This is especially important as the internet contributed to the process of state formation, providing alternative mobility, and shaping the imagination of the Palestinian nation. The internet has enabled Palestinians to communicate with each other from different, previously unconnected places. I discerned two related processes in these newly established transnational relations. First, the act of communicating itself was very significant, because it meant connecting Palestinians to each other. This was a new phenomenon, possible for the first time since 1948 on this scale. Second, the content of the transnational communication through the online discussions and diasporic traversals led to a new way of creating and imagining national identity. Meanwhile, direct contact, especially between refugees and non-refugees and people in divergent socio-economic circumstances, also led to what I termed 'little scratches'

in the collective imagined community. For example, disappointment about Palestinian unity felt by refugees in Lebanon who discovered that not all Palestinians in the OT were considered with the plight and rights of refugees in the host countries, in turn engendered a re-examination of the 'ideal' Palestinian nation. The construction of an imagined community is thus a continuous process that is directly linked to class, politics and mobility.

Internet Mobility

The 1948 (Al Nakba) and 1967 (Al Naksa) exodus of Palestinians—and the refusal of the Israeli state to allow their return, links the term Palestinian diaspora to forced displacement. The concepts mobility and immobility are therefore connected to the political struggle for the right of return or acknowledgement of their exile. The major problem facing Palestinians is a lack of freedom of movement, and so Palestinian internet use clearly served a deeply felt need. Besides the flow of people, the flow of information is also strongly controlled. In Palestine, the internet is embedded in a colonial reality. Even after the Oslo agreement, Israel continued to stifle the information flow into and out of the occupied territories. Immobility and control was partly overcome when internet usage enabled direct transnational communication and grassroots participation in news production. Palestinian publishers, commercial entrepreneurs, and government projects capitalised on the possibilities of the internet. The contradictions between virtual mobility and everyday immobility were especially great on a personal level.

The virtual traversals have had a tremendous impact in overcoming a sense of alienation. The internet provides different forms of entertainment that are badly wanted, considering the problems isolation and alienation that many Palestinians suffer in the refugee camps. In addition to this form of 'escapism', direct connection also enhanced the confidence of the refugee communities, helping to *reinsert* the refugees at the centre of Palestinian politics. Yet, the online traversals cannot overcome all barriers; material support that was needed for internet projects in the occupied territories were often prevented by checkpoints, closures and curfew, while equipment for the ICT sector was often withheld at the borders. Nevertheless, the fragmented Palestinian nation was meanwhile being reconfigured by websites, chat, emailing, and internet projects in which the diaspora often participated. Internet users in refugee camps found contact with their long lost brethren, disseminated feature stories and facts, and also consumed information from the new (global) sources. In other words, online mobility re-constructed national identity. The internet changed the dynamics of social relations; the junction between technology and social practices is found in the development of an alternative linguistic style. *Cyber slang*, in due course, increased the level of grassroots participation.

Internet communication was grounded in imaginations about the (return to) homeland. The importance of online mediation is related to the discrepancy between a collectively envisioned future and an experienced present. The act of communicating

itself (internet medium) and the content (internet message) affected the collective imagination of the nation. Online meetings and encounters strengthen a particular refugee/class consciousness amongst Palestinians. This interaction led to little scratches as well as challenges to Palestinian unity. I explained that collective national identity does not do away with internal (class or gender) differences. I also observed a politicized and collective participation. Overcoming immobility by direct interaction combined with the sense of (political) confirmation is a key element in the process of identification and the collective imagination of Palestinian community online. Online interaction with text and images regarding (people in) Palestine strengthen this sense of commonality and shared values.

The Intifada politicized Palestinian entrepreneurs who on their commercial websites made references to the Israeli closures and occupation, and people from the elite class also initiated websites about Palestinian culture/history. Whereas the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada spearheaded internet consumption, it also validates the strong imagination of a free Palestinian nation. Interaction with or about Palestine in cyber space nurtures those sentiments with a nationalist/unified character. The fact that such political identities are contested means that the construction of a political/comradely community translates into activist-oriented expressions. This is why collective identity is often simultaneously imagined regardless of class, regional, and gender differences, as confirmed by the engagement of Palestinians like Murad, in Amman for *Jerusalemites,* and Jenni, in Australia for *Palestine Costume Archive*.

The Nation, the Net and the Internet Café

Despite the 'crises' of the nation-state and notions of 'de-territorialisation' as debated in the first two chapters, the nation-state, locality and political independence are in fact crucial, and share in the imagination of the Palestinian homeland and community. This special kind of anticolonial, progressive nationalism relates to Anderson's (1992) 'long-distance nationalism' as a kind of nationalism that does not necessarily depend on territorial location in a home country. I argued that colonialism is a prime reference of the electronic media in Palestinian society, and that an *anti-colonial* nationalism is a common identification in the context of exile and occupation because the offline situation and international political opinion strongly influences Palestinian online presence. Several case studies illustrated a wide variety of personal motivations. The Across Borders Project, for example, shows how an imagined Palestinian nation is influenced by the internet, since ABP participants in Lebanon and Palestine depict how the internet shapes a *virtual* imagined Palestinian Nation.

In general, the internet functions as an outlet to express what takes place in the occupied Territories, and to Palestinians in the Lebanese diaspora, the internet has offered direct knowledge about the homeland and live communication. The internet provided an important and long-desired meeting point. The internet, combined with grassroots Palestinian interactivity, redefines the relation between territorial place and virtual space. The internet allows a kind of communication between Palestinians that

was not possible before, connecting politics and media, the virtual and the real. These innovations impact the Palestinian imagination of a collective nation. Websites became the mediating 'spaces' through which the Palestinian nation is often imagined and the use of internet motivated the emergence of hundreds of Palestinian websites. Technological developments, the *Arabization* of the interface, and an eminent public relations strategy towards Western audiences, marked the groundbreaking developments of websites. I have categorized the collected Palestinian websites and identified both *globalizing* and *localizing* websites. If emailing, chatting and mailing lists are the vehicles that re-structure the diaspora, then the Palestinian websites are the pillars of this new structure. One can not overestimate the emotional and political impact for a refugee in Lebanon who could finally come across a site about his or her original village in Palestine.

By also investigating the *mode of operation* of websites I was able to know how websites were grounded and to know the people behind the websites. Internet access and usage, it turns out, is influenced by latent and manifested forms of control. At the start of collecting Palestinian websites the prevailing style was a secular and national presence. On one level, this is not surprising, since the aim is to convince the (biased) international community about the Palestinian plight. Almost invariably, Palestinian (Arab) users are not the main target, and thus their desires (need) not included in the (tactical) decisions regarding online linking and framing. Moreover, negatively biased views about Islam(ism) would 'distract' the project of *re-humanising* Palestinians that serve to mobilise solidarity. I discovered that one (unexpected) result of this online public sphere was to create a system of *exclusion*. Some of the popular websites among Palestinians I interviewed, such as websites linked to Hamas or Hezbollah, were not referred to by the leading (globalizing) websites.

One of the great opportunities during this Ph.D research was to help set-up the P@IS project. During the course of this project I was able to compare my ethnographic research with comprehensive data analyses. It turned out that the quantitative and qualitative approach in our different methodologies strengthened one-another. After co-linkages and locating web content, P@ISP, found fragmented networks for Hamas and Fatah. The different political-ideological networks also represented different infrastructures. Unlike Fatah, which offered informative (often old) content and predominantly linking to other Fatah related websites, Hamas networks showed a complex set of multilingual websites with frequently updated content in text and multimedia. While the main Hamas website (Palestine Information Centre) had a links page to other (pro)Palestinian online sources; as a systematic search for out-links of all Hamas related websites P@IS could not retrieve significant hyperlinks that connect the different audiences.[213] Nevertheless, on the ground Hamas was clearly considered popular and more sophisticated online.

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[213] See the P@ISP (November 2007/by Anat Ben David) report *Content Distribution in Isolated Networks: How RSS Replaced the Hyperlink for Hamas and Hizbullah*, page 2.

Hamas utilizes syndication over linking by having built a virtual network comprised of links for RSS (Really Simple Syndication) readers. Users can subscribe to the feed or other websites (via XML codes) to republish (i.e. syndicate) the feed/source to their own website. Effectively speaking, the content is there, but not easily traceable, and therefore has two advantages--it does not have to rely on content-distribution networks, and through these multiple channels neither fear potential hackers. P@ISP shows that Hamas has an 'end-user strategy' with targeting tactics based on; email subscription, RSS feeds and posting content on another website. The end-user culture and the order of the three subscription options tell the history of RSS with a 'Middle Eastern twist'. Hamas, and in a comparative analyses also Hezbollah, stood out as unusual actors "not because of the nature of their organization, but because of their unusual linking behaviour and self-reliance on their content distributions." P@ISP identified a similar net behaviour for Hamas and Hezbollah, this is a similarity also drawn by many 'counter-Terrorism' studies. But to P@ISP, the interpretation "does not focus on the nature of these organizations (a legitimate political party for some, a terrorist organization for others) but looks at them as actors operating in a larger webspace."[214] The analyses also confirm how technological leaps from 1996–2006 in Palestine have played an important role as I outline in the *Palestinian Internet Time Table* (Table 1).

One of the crucial reminders of offline research is that the virtual does not replace the territorial. The internet did not replace the desire for a (non-virtual) nation-state. The frameworks of this online public sphere were found in the many mailing lists, and later chat-rooms and MSN. While generating knowledge about the present, the internet also helped recover the past. For example, the way destroyed villages were systematically displayed online has revived and reconfigured memory. Therefore analysing virtual participation is linked to political economic structures and everyday social realities. Working in the camps enabled me to see the (often illegal) infrastructures and networks, the creative tapping of satellite connection, and other forms of agency. ICT structures alter face-to-face participation of Palestinian producers and consumers, in internet cafes in particular. One of the important conclusions about internet cafes as new public places offline is that they also promote social change.

ICs represent the new spaces where the offline and online meet, and capture important aspects of the interlock between virtual and everyday life practices. ICs are contested spaces especially when seen through the prism of gender. This new public space remind one of the first 'coffee houses' in the debates about the public spheres: internet cafes were neither neutral/public nor completely closed spaces. They also signify processes of change and agency such as the tactical participation of women and establishing Curfew ICs. New virtual network communities and ICs impose new

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[214] Idem, page 6. With this approach P@ISP contributed in developing and strengthening in-depth and multiple-disciplinary analyses, and which also helps to go beyond the hypes and stereotypes in media and academia such as E. Reid (Reid et.al, 2005) Collecting and Analyzing the Presence of Terrorists on the Web; A case Study of Jihad websites.

interpretations about place, time and space which are best examined in their local setting. In the meantime people trespass the social boundaries by flirting online and arranging offline rendezvous. Access to people and information about sensitive topics like sexuality or politics were not available on this massive scale, at such high speed, and in such an anonymous fashion before.

Internet Resistance

In contrast with the way 'sexy' topics about Palestinian internet usage are sometimes framed vis-à-vis 'radical islam' and 'cyber war' (Chapter Five), I found that identification and representation take shape around a secular/national rather than a religious/extremist axis. The online characters constitute the offline *real* politics, facilitating a national/anticolonial engagement of the community. Thus, because of the politically driven transnational goals and strategies, Islamic/ist references are lacking, rather than shaping the online world. This clearly relates to the "Middle East twist' mentioned above. P@ISP concluded that (generally speaking) Palestinian/Middle East internet "differs from Western societies by their strong relation with the ground."[215] This is a significant verification of my analysis and corresponds closely with the arguments delineated in all the chapters, especially vis-à-vis the dialectics of offline/online internet and the relation between internet and the political situation in terms of exile and occupation.

Tactical means of resistance are at the core of offline and online activist networks that mobilize in and/or for Palestine. The way Palestinians try to achieve their political demands via the internet, and the role Palestinian diasporas/solidarity activists play as well, was one of the fascinating progresses to study. The activism, which I termed *Cyber Intifada*, is based on the interpretation of resistance as an anti-colonial project that involves direct-action and support. Internet technologies serve as part of the general Palestinian tools, repertoires and tactics of protest. Dissemination of alternative information is one of the most important tools in the competition over audiences (their potential support, to be more precise). Independent journalism gives participants more democratic control over content and representation of news; activists have erected new online sources like *Indymedia* and blogs.

Hear Palestine, Palestine Monitor mailing lists, local websites, and chat-forums took part in this competition as they assumed the *permission to narrate* their history. Furthermore, closure and military repression limited the possibility to organize public meetings by political parties but started to be contrasted by lively online debates and mobilization. The political utilisation of internet and the construction of alternative public spheres matured with the creation of discussion forums by popular political movements like Hamas and Fatah. The internet fits in broader resistance and concentrates on the aim to disseminate, to organize, and to attack. I deconstruct the cyber intifada in three ways: as a public relation tool to convince international

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[215] Idem, page 5.

audiences, to recruit activists and mobilization/organize for local and global protests, and as a weapon, via hacking. This combination makes the internet a 'Scottian' *weapon of the weak* as I explained in the discussion about the concept of resistance in chapters two and seven. However, I also propose that equating cyber intifada and internet activism with anti-colonial struggle or grassroots resistance is problematic. With reference to Gramsci, I argued that technological developments and internet utilisation help to *assert* and *contest* status-quo power.

These theoretical contributions did not stand by themselves. Online and offline ethnography challenged my views regarding political and social movements. Firstly, certain offline, on the ground, experiences cannot be transformed into virtual internet experiences, no matter how flashy or entertaining websites or internet games were. Secondly, while emails and websites help to motivate different publics and disseminate news and information, a personal debate/face-to-face conversation is often crucial to generate commitment. People will generally be mobilised to join a movement or protest via offline affiliation and persuasion, especially where this engagement concerns defending what is "controversial" or literally dangerous. Internet activism, I found, is not a surrogate for offline and everyday resistance. This point became even clearer when I started to uncover the *Janus-faced* character of the internet, namely one that is a blessing *and* a curse. Therefore, after this short summary of the mobility/space/oppression debate in the preceding chapters, I will focus on how to evaluate the general pro's and con's of internet.

8.3 The Internet: A Blessing and a Curse

> To some extent the new technologies are revolutionary and do constitute a revolution of everyday life, but it is often a revolution that promotes and disseminates the capitalist society and involves new modes of fetishism, enslavement, and domination, yet to be clearly perceived and theorized (Kellner 2002: 299).

> There are incidents, I think, where governments are involved, doing either reconnaissance or testing out concepts.… I would hope that one of the lessons we learned from September 11 is that you don't wait for a disaster to occur before we fix the problems we know exist. (Richard Clarke, US National Security adviser, 2004).[216]

US foreign policies never showed much enthusiasm to defend Palestinians, but the neo-conservative Bush administration led to an even more openly bigoted stance. When the FBI raided the *InfoCom* Web Company in Texas, leading intellectual Muslim bashers actually applauded.[217] *InfoCom* hosted more then 500 websites including al-

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[216] Clarke: Nations using internet to spy. November 5 2004. aljazeera.net
[217] Daniel Pipes and Steven Emerson, Rolling Back the Forces of Terror, Wall Street Journal, August 13, 2001.

Jazeera, Palestinian fund *Holy Land Foundation*, and other Muslim websites. The post-9/11 context has increased policing and surveillance. A determining transformation ushering in new policies like the US Patriot act was also replicated in other countries. State/military powers increasingly use the internet to spy on 'enemies' and sometimes organise digital attacks. I discern an evolution from the somewhat *cool* internet activism—with the 1990s grassroots Zapatista rebellion in Mexico as the progressive token example, towards a potential state-organised 'preventive' cyber war. Clarke's alarmist comments above, regarding the use of internet for 'counter-terrorism,' begin to articulate this second vision.

Alongside the internet curse, the Israeli occupation causes a variety of difficult circumstances, and forced Palestinian exile hampers Palestinian grassroots resistance. But: the internet has opened new arenas of contestation, as well as accommodating dissident groups online, such as media activists. In spite of pro-Israeli media, (and historically motivated legitimacy/support for Israel), several polls showed a shift in opinion since the Intifada.[218] On the other side, the internet also broadened the space of political participation via direct media activism and counter-hegemonic discourses. Chapter Seven presented the complexity of the (assumed) revolutionary endeavour of internet politics. I showed that student groups, intellectuals and political activists in Jordan found a space to express their dissent or reveal political scandals. The experiences of Aloush in Amman were similar to those addressed by Rahimi (2003) on Iran. The early internet developments in Iran were set in a very *open* environment and in various ways contributed to the political turmoil of the late 1990's. As late as 2003, the internet was free of control and even actively encouraged by the state; student protests were hardly measured by Iranian state authority as a way to curtail their internet use. They display the democratic potential and decentralising impact of internet tactics.

The aim of the next section is to emphasize the limitations of the 'utopian' vs. 'dystopian' dichotomy: rather, the internet might lead to submission as well as facilitate resistance. I call this paradoxical situation the internet *Blessing and Curse*. Building further from the conclusion in the above section, I will describe this dialectic view more closely. I will discern '*civil disobedience'* the major *blessing,* and for the *curse* of internet I discuss the '*Damocles sword'* hanging above the activist's computer.

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[218] According to the European Commission survey of November 2003 Europeans view Israel as a great threat to world peace, ahead of Iran and North Korea. The *Eurobarometer* poll found that 59 per cent deemed Israel "a threat to peace in the world", with the figures rising to 60 per cent in Britain, 65 in Germany, 69 in Austria and 74 in Holland. The results prompted a furious reaction from the Israeli government and pro Israel lobby groups kinked the results to anti-Semitism. Frattini, Italy's foreign minister and EU representative at the time had to apologise for the results on behalf of the EU. See http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,,1076084,00.html "Israel outraged as EU poll names it a threat to peace", by Peter Beaumont, Sunday November 2, 2003.

Blessing: Online Disobedience

> "You can fool some people sometimes but you can't fool all the people all the time." Bob Marley [inspired by a quote from Abraham Lincoln] in the song *Get up Stand up*, from the 1973 album *Burnin*.

The new possibilities offered by the internet are crucial for Palestinians because Palestine is occupied by the fourth strongest military state in the world, and more than half the Palestinian population is dispersed outside the Palestinian territories, i.e. excluded from the geographic centre of struggle. Palestine is regarded the territorial point of reference, centre of gravity. But the occupied Palestinian territories are the 'weak centre of gravity' as Hanafi (2001:14) described. Online discussions and virtual debates have the capacity to unite Palestinian communities not just as part of a cultural/historic community, but in a political sense as well. Palestinians co-produce a particular, national, public sphere online. Like the traditional Palestinian liberation movements, they are connected to the collective nation/struggle. New internet technologies contributed to the reconstruction of national identity.

The history of the Palestinian people is important for understanding contemporary Palestinian political identity, one very much influenced by a collective experience of displacement and oppression. Collective identity is also shaped by Palestinian experiences of *Sumoud* (steadfastness) and *Intifada* (uprising). Since it is hardly possible to escape the realities of the occupation, the al-Aqsa' Intifada became a part of daily life for Palestinians inside the territories. Albeit in a different way, Palestinians outside the territories are impacted by the Intifada as well. At the same time, the internet served as a tool for empowerment because it offers an alternative space for local/regional activism. Examples of websites, local mailing lists, and grassroots (refugee camp) internet projects provide easy-to-access (cyber) meeting points, and (Pro)-Palestinian bloggers covered on the ground events in the occupied territories. The Intifada and the growing use of internet provided a political and communicative re-orientation towards the Palestinian Territories. This re-orientation is represented by political analyses and solidarity projects that challenged the hierarchic structures and triggered new styles of civil disobedience. I focus on: decentralisation and internationalization that benefit this democratic tendency.

By using new media forms, social/protest movements developed alternative voices against the expansion of ruling elites. 'Bottom up' or 'grassroots' internet groups emerged and started to pose a potential threat, as evidenced by attempts of governments in the US as well as Middle East to close down parts of the internet. The question is whether activism via the internet jeopardizes Israeli hegemony considering its capacity to suppress political disobedience, and what impact it has when people's awareness of monitoring leads to self-censoring, as I will explain in the next section.

Prior to and during the Intifada, Palestinians have waged protests against the Palestinian National Authority. A form of political decentralization through websites of political groups was partly possible because controlling the internet (or closing it down) in Palestine is not only difficult, but also a sensitive issue in a context where

revolt and political consciousness is very high. So when I asked whether internet users were afraid of state control/prevention of the internet, it was considered irrelevant. During interviews with internet activists in Palestine, I was also told that the Palestinian authority was too engaged by more important problems which people to monitor or exclude online was not a priority.[219] Moreover, access to proxy servers through which there might be form of control and censorship by PNA was difficult, because Israeli companies control them. As a result, webmasters were also able to bypass PA telecom networks and upload data by using Israeli systems.

Through several cases in this thesis I have described activist networks which organized their efforts via mailing lists, websites, chat sessions or MSN. These efforts included solidarity campaigns, eyewitness reports, calls for demonstrations, virtual anniversaries of the Intifada, and more. This reveals how a centralised style of organizing is combined with grassroots initiatives. Historically, national mobilisation through posters/leaflets is a prominent part of organising in the Occupied Territories because other sources (independent media/press) were monitored by Israel. This was a predominantly offline political (parties and factions) practice during the first Intifada (1987-1993). The Second Intifada marked a new era by the cyber leafleting. I argue that the offline organized (and often official) wall poster/leafleting, as evident in the streets and camps, is still the most dominant, but an example in the West Bank in 2002 showed that virtual and actual methods became intertwined. Public communiqués and posters (with the official logo) of al-*Aqsa Brigade* appeared in the streets in Jenin and online. In fact, it was decided that only the posters that are *also* published on the party's website would be regarded as official.

In other ways, virtual participation partly transcends the official authority and central mobilization--political groups outside the territories are not completely excluded from the flow of information in Palestine anymore. This challenged the official political agenda where it concerns the struggle for the right of return and the position of refugees. As efforts in Lebanon to organize a refugee poll through the internet show, many support the 'homeland' but also want to be part in the decision-making processes. Political organisers outside the Occupied Territories were also able to be reached by Palestinian cadres inside, and vice versa. As the activist from the al-Aqsa faction in Lebanon told me in 2003:

> We get the reports and communiqués through the net and distribute them here. We on our side became part of the Intifada by offering them our military expertise, how to make bombs, rockets, etc. We can infiltrate the wall, which Israel is building to divide us.

Palestinians and their supporters showed that with internet the international community can no longer claim ignorance of the Palestinian plight. The Internet is

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[219] This dynamic changed over the last years. The PNA became even more centralised and committed itself to US brokered politics of appeasement (Hassan 2003), it also became more repressive to political opponents.

practically forced upon Palestinians by political circumstances. *On the ground in Ramallah* in 1996 was the first act against distorted representation about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and demystified many of the myths that circulated. Several of its initiators later transformed its principles into the influential *Electronic Intifada* that challenged the bias reporting during the second Intifada. Sometimes online activism can lead to offline activism and broader international support lead to solidarity/activism. The Second Intifada witnessed broader coalitions and grassroots solidarity groups being set up. Internationalization includes support from nearby countries in the Middle East—an important factor because through popular pressures in Arab countries governments were exposed as giving mostly lip-service support to Palestinians.

When I asked people how they see 'internet revolution' they usually mentioned the transnational reach and its anonymous communication style. Internet assists political movements to undermine oppressive regimes, offered important space for agency. For example, people posted their protest calls on chat rooms of *Maktoob*, and with three million members, the potential for political mobilization is obvious. It gives a platform to anti-government sentiments as nothing before did. Internet reconnection between Palestinians had a high value, and as Ibrahim from Amman told me, "it is also enormously important to help connect with non-Palestinian supporters everywhere in the world."

One of the examples that best represents an internationally based solidarity for Palestine—and has the internet at the core of its work is the International Solidarity movement (ISM). Apart from its main language, English, the site is also in Arabic, Spanish and French, and thanks to the 15 support groups that provide a link to the site in their own languages, including Swedish, Irish, and German. The ISM recruitment mainly happened through the internet but ISM leaders travel around the world to speak at teach-ins, demonstrations and meetings; activists in different countries set-up support groups that pick up the work internationally. This means that offline organizing is still of great importance. As Adam told me, "After a speech I always tell people to go online and read our publications and personal stories. It empowers people at home when they realize the activists and victims are just like them, people basically want to help based on what they saw and heard. We prefer they have direct contact with the support group in their locality, that's how we maximize our impact." If there wasn't the internet to organise efficient coordination and advertise their campaign to recruit people and money, the ISM would have face many problems.

I have illustrated that beside the information battle there are also direct confrontations between online groups; this level of activism is particularly renowned by the hacktivist battles. Hacktivism can be considered the electronic version of *civil disobedience*. The internationally set-up initiatives mostly communicated and organised their actions via cyber space. Very significantly in this example is that the internet gave space for participation of non-elite/marginal groups. Refugees from Lebanon joined hackers communities and felt they shared in the Intifada. There is indeed more

political freedom online than offline, but I have also noticed a certain cautiousness among activists. This relates to what I consider the *curse* of internet.

Curse: Damocles

Critical analyses are required in order to balance the over-idealization of the potentials ascribed to internet technology. As situated before, the internet hype was connected to utopian ideas about a new globalized-postmodern-world in which virtual reality was the new alternative. But it did not work out that way, exactly. When *Indymedia* was shut down during the April 2002 sieges, people woke up to the first reality check. Determined activists continued their efforts by spreading news and giving live reports via telephone, but an alarm had sounded. From assessments of internet technology, it was clear that to have free access to the internet, more than just basic connection is needed; control over standard infrastructure, cables, and buildings is crucial. Free market economy and neo-liberalist ideology was strongly connected to early IT promises. But the 'liberating' ICT pledge was never kept. The IT bubble burst and the real picture that emerged was of naked capitalism. Instead of the 'trickle down effect', the digital-divide and economic gaps were alive and kicking.

This critique does not contradict the above-mentioned blessings but shows the underlying complexities. I aspire to move beyond the legitimate but sometimes also reductive criticism of 'technological determinism', and the euphoric but unrealistic notions of a 'technological revolution'. I point to the importance of the underlying contradictions of globalization in order to present a more nuanced picture and capture the fundamental dynamics of contemporary political-economic power. Refusing 'objective' (material) realities can lead to a process of de-politization or convey problems in our grounded analyses. This problem is very concrete when internet cafes or internet connection at home is prohibited. This is, first of all, related to a general economic problem of class inequality, and in particular, the status of refugees in camps who were often not allowed to build their own sustainable infrastructure. Another problem is the fact that young women in remote camps sometimes cannot travel to an internet café. It is thus important to include the everyday dynamics of digital divides in our analyses.

The (depoliticized) idealization of the internet often goes hand in hand with championing the free market. The 'liberation' notion of the internet was formulated by Thomas Friedman (1999). He argued that global communications and global finance are the two great democratizing forces where no one owns the internet or is able to turn it off. And thus he particularly predicted that China would develop a free press, even if the Chinese leaders do not know that yet, or oppose it. But many examples have since countered this neo-liberal utopian view, and recent studies, such

as Open Net Initiative,[220] showed that many governments have been censoring the internet, including Friedman's token China. George Monbiot offers a compelling illustration:[221]

> Shi Tao, a journalist working for a Chinese newspaper, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for "providing state secrets to foreign entities". He had passed details of a censorship order to the Asia Democracy Forum and the website Democracy News. The pressure group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) was mystified by the ease with which Mr. Tao had been caught. He had sent the message through an anonymous Yahoo! account. But the police had gone straight to his office and picked him up. How did they know who he was? Last week RSF obtained a translation of the verdict, and there they found the answer. Mr Tao's account information was "furnished by Yahoo Holdings". Yahoo!, the document says, gave the government his telephone number and address of his office. So much for the promise that the internet would liberate the oppressed."

Monitoring has continued. In 2002, the BBC reported that in 2001 Chinese authorities had shut down 1, 700 internet cafes that did not abide to rules concerning restricted online sources.[222] Ownership, technological set-up, or financial interests greatly impact the potentially democratic success of internet access. Kahn and Kellner (2004:89) describe how the Patriot Act introduced the implementation of powerful governmental surveillance systems, such as Echelon and Carnivore. These systems can monitor all forms of electronic information for keywords and behavior that is deemed potentially threatening.[223]

Internet activists became more aware of the potential political risks. As Monbiot explains, *Yahoo!* had already in 2002 signed the Chinese governments' assurance of self-regulation; they promised not to allow information that jeopardizes state security. A few years later *Google* — who had even promoted their online freedom as an alternative to Bill Gates' Microsoft dominance, admitted that it would not offer links that contain material officially banned in China. The reasons of such incidents have to do with the fact that the internet is a technological tool and relates to the logic of ICT corporations. Monbiot counters Friedman:

> [H]e forgets the intermediaries. The technology which runs the internet did not sprout from the ground. It is provided by people with a commercial interest in its development. Their interest will favour freedom in some places and control in others."

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[220] Open Net Initiative is a joint project between institutions at University of Toronto, Harvard Law School, University of Cambridge, and Oxford University. ONI documents worldwide Internet filtering, surveillance and censorship and has collected an impressive archive.
[221] In the Guardian, September 13 2005
[222] In: Litt and Laegram in New Media & Society, 2003 vol 5 (3) 307-312.
[223] Intriguing is the transformation of the Total Information Awareness (TIA) databank into Terrorism Information Awareness immediately after 9/11 (:89).

The IT multinational Cisco Systems cited by Friedman as one of the facilitators of internet freedom is, in reality, one of the powerful corporations that provided technology and expertise for the filter systems and routers for oppressive regimes. Furthermore, the emerging policing measures limit the movement of people and ideas, especially in the context of war. In Palestine, the ISM was confronted with a similar situation as *Indymedia*; suddenly there wasn't a capacity to use their main tool:

> During the heavy sieges whereby every minute was dedicated to organize and publish, ISM worked together with Indymedia in Palestine. We would call our support groups in New York and Los Angeles with briefings that they helped post online or faxed.

The ISM was forced to reorganize due to the security matters. For instance, at the beginning, activists registered directly through the website to volunteer in Palestine, but when the ISM offices were raided and hard-drives taken (when it became clear that they were being monitored), they had to rethink this practice. They changed tactics and urged people not to send passport numbers or even flight details through the net. The ISM took special care: they had people in Ramallah (where the site is maintained) to secure the data while support groups around the world offered technological skills. Related to this became the question: in which way can the importance of offline mobilization be compared to online activism and mobilization.

Adam admitted that 'The internet is good yet impersonal. Many people came to hear me speak after they either saw me on television or in articles. To see me face-to-face is important, because the whole thing becomes tangible. Besides, the internet doesn't reach everybody." The increased violence against Palestinians and activists in Palestine clearly affected the ISM. The on-the-ground reactions made them switch from being pro-active to protective: "We are trying to move back to the pro-active strategies. For sure, there are certain things we can't do anymore and we have to operate in bigger groups than before". Violence against unarmed foreigners (journalists, UN workers, and activists) eventually had a negative impact on new recruitments. But the immediate responses saw the contrary. The news about the deaths of these activists served as a mobilizing force: "…as the violence increased we got more people… by the end of April, instead of the planned 150, we received over 300 people. Rachel was killed, then Tom was shot, then Brian was shot…but instead of scaring us off, the opposite happened."

Beside the offline challenges, the points I stress in this section concern monitoring and *virtual imperialism;* a term coined by Rheingold with regards to the digital-divide (1993) that turns out to be even more symbolic in this discussion. Sometimes it is a dilemma; emailing and mobile text contact is the fastest communication for activists, but that media is also highly susceptible to monitoring. The internet can be used, without a doubt, but often at one's own risk. Digitalization of communication thus makes the user more vulnerable to state control, and may cause self-sensorship. This *potential* monitoring of what people access or email comes down to a politics of intimidation: a *Damocles Sword*. Several authors have pointed to

this process (Rohozinski 2003), and the Information Warfare Monitor examines how states and non-state actors exploit information and information systems. [224]

At the time of research, this information warfare *inside* the Palestinian political context was not a big issue because the PNA did not have the ability to control Palestinians' internet usage. The political reality undermined Arafat's ability to control his people at the time and hence compromised his authority. As Sam Bahour stated during an interview in 2002:

> The PNA doesn't have the technological competence to censor internet. The ICT community is so vocal and well organized compared to other sectors anyway, the will and ability to prohibit censorship is stronger than the will of the government. Although we have a lot of complaints, this is a star to Arafat and the PNA.

This was a blessing, but also reveals an element of the curse that Palestinians face. One of the major reasons for this failure of the internet to empower Palestinians is, the military occupation by Israel. Fearing its use as a tool of resistance, the Israeli army have attacked internet providers or cut their connections. Sam Bahour described the situation:

> Our environment is under a microscope, we should be frank about it. I laugh when website companies sell promises about 'security' of websites. The word internet equals 'insecurity'. The awareness is at least that insecurity of the internet is not a de-motivating factor for people to utilize it, but that it belongs to it. A comprehensive solution also requires funds, which is not available here and now.

Israel controls the infrastructure and may decide whether Palestinians can access the telecom service. The destructive impact of the Israeli military on Palestinian society included Telecommunications and media, such as occupying radio and television stations. And when owners of local radio and television stations returned to their studios they found their offices plundered and their equipment damaged. Amwaj television station had its programs cancelled and replaced by a German porn channel.[225] Moreover, Israeli companies can prevent dissemination by and access to internet if it wants to, but often did not for intelligence and economic reasons. The economic benefits of the private sector in Palestine were a major factor in the reluctance to control (and thus discourage) internet: freedom and control are thus two sides of the same coin. Whereas the internet created a form of political decentralization and led to a process of democratization, there are also examples of

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[224] Information Warfare Monitor is an advanced research project Advanced Network Research Group at the University of Cambridge. The project seeks to examine this emerging dimension of global security. http://www.infowar-monitor.net/index.php.
[225] Report from Rita Giacaman at Birzeit University, 16 April 2002 and Palestinereport.org, April 3 2002. The main international donors; UN, WB, and Government of Norway, had estimated that only during the March/April incursions caused physical damage in the West Bank only to be 361 million US dollar, with most loss's in the private sector.

the Israeli show of force with regards to internet access. This was experienced directly by PalNet. During our talk the owner of PalNet described how they were targeted:

> At 2.30 in morning, Monday July 15 the IDF invaded our building. The soldiers came inside, searched the whole building, broke or blew up doors that were closed. They eventually entered the main power source room and shut down the complete connection, which resulted in all the internet lines being cut for 24 hours. The soldiers stayed here. I was wondering why only our company in this building was cut off, if it was not deliberate, then why? Well I think they came for us, they wanted to turn us off. They don't like what we're doing on the Net.

The situation is precarious. It is not clear in which direction the military-political activity in relation to Palestinian internet will go. Military crackdowns have continued in scope and severity, but at the same time, new technologies such as satellite internet connections offer a potential escape from reliance on Israeli internet producers like Beseq. The very fact that everyday life still gives rise to political agency is also important to remember. This thesis continually emphasizes how ICT technology has been used to combat oppression, and has shown how online activism works with on-the-ground organizing and demonstrations. Many creative activists employ internet and computer technologies in the struggle against injustice, and have been effective. But the challenges imposed by fierce and equally dynamic ruling regimes remain, as they co-opt the internet as a means of control. The internet has been a mixed blessing for Palestinians, although the story of its use in their ongoing struggle is far from over.
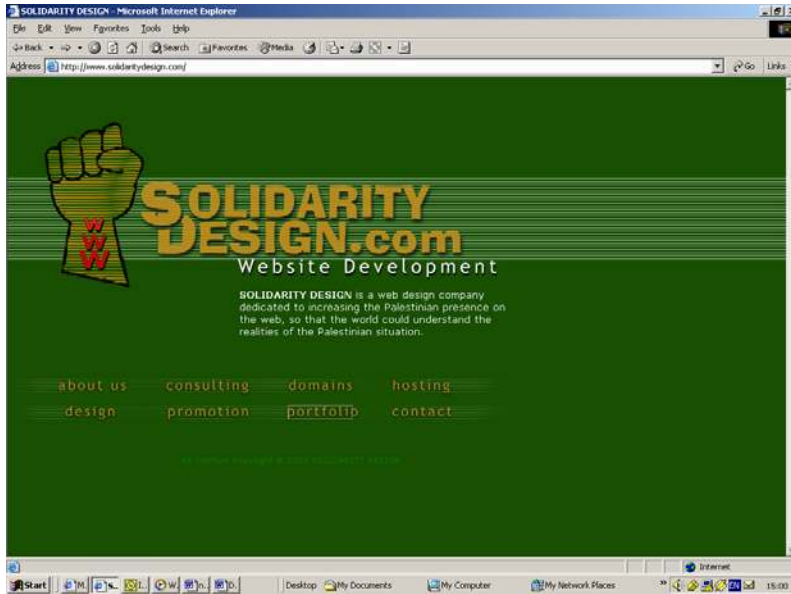
Pictures

Figure 11: Homepage of *Solidarity Design*

Figure 12: *Palestine Monitor* Website, here supporting *Palestine Media Watch*

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Figure 13: *That al Ramad* (Underash!) Virtual Intifada game
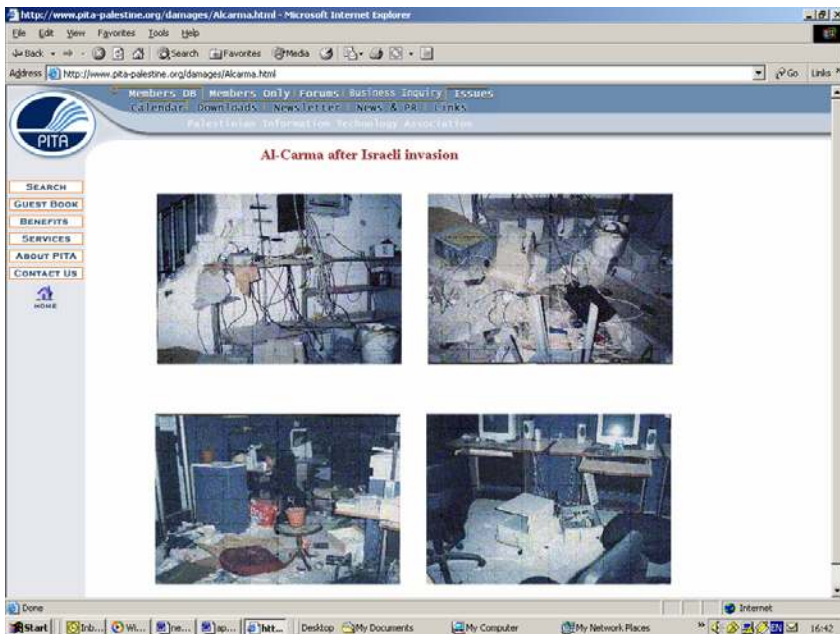

Figure 14: *Al Carma* IC in Ramallah after being attacked during 2002 incursions

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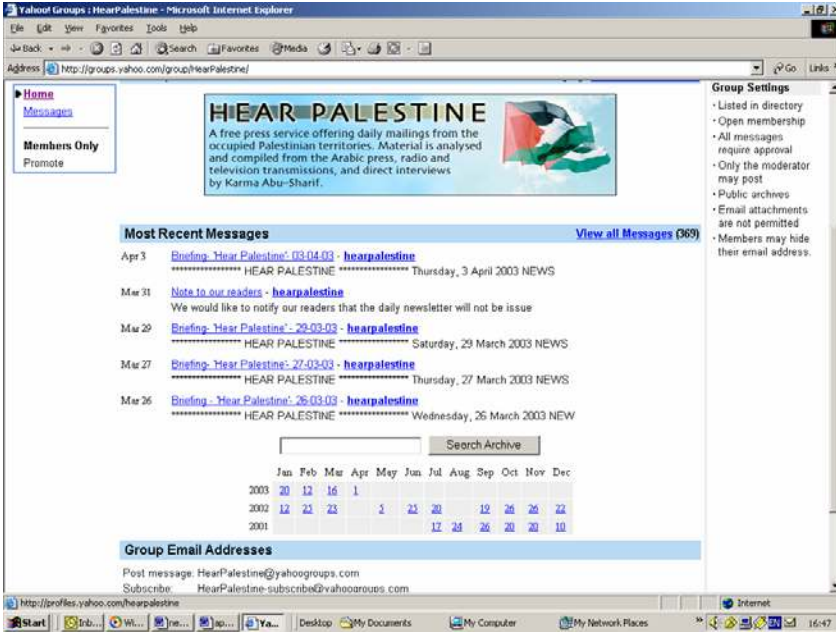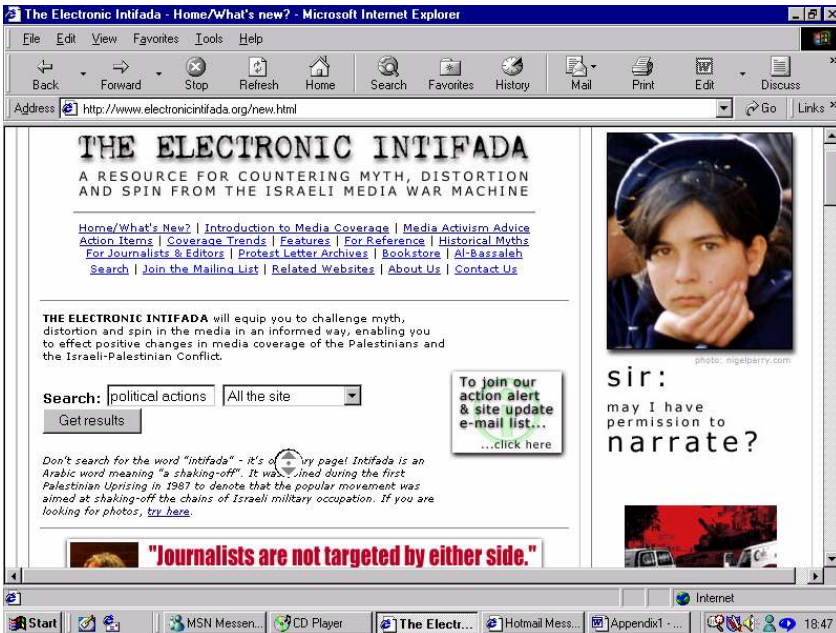Figure 15: *Hear Palestine* mailing list, set up by Karma in Ramallah

Figure 16: *Electronic Intifada* Website: reclaiming the 'permission to narrate'

Figure 17: Electricity cuts in Bour al-Barajna/Beirut *Sirhaan Net* IC: thanks to UPS internet use can continue for extra hours

Figure 18: Shatila Camp/Beirut: A Web of electricity cables and wires cover the narrow streets of the overpopulated refugee camp

Figure 19: Example of popular Intifada images that circulated on the internet. Left; Faris Odeh, right; Mohammed al-Durra

Figure 20: Telephone "Central" in Bourj al-Shamali regugee camp. Internet connection makes it possible to call family and friends in the diaspora. Clocks from right to left point to time in: Riyad, New York, Germany/Sweden, London

Figure 21: Palestinian Identity on internet: "*Online Commoditization*"

Figure 22: Curtains and Mirror to offer "Protection" and guarantee "Modesty" at *Al Jaleel* IC Ain al-Hilwe camp/Saida 2003
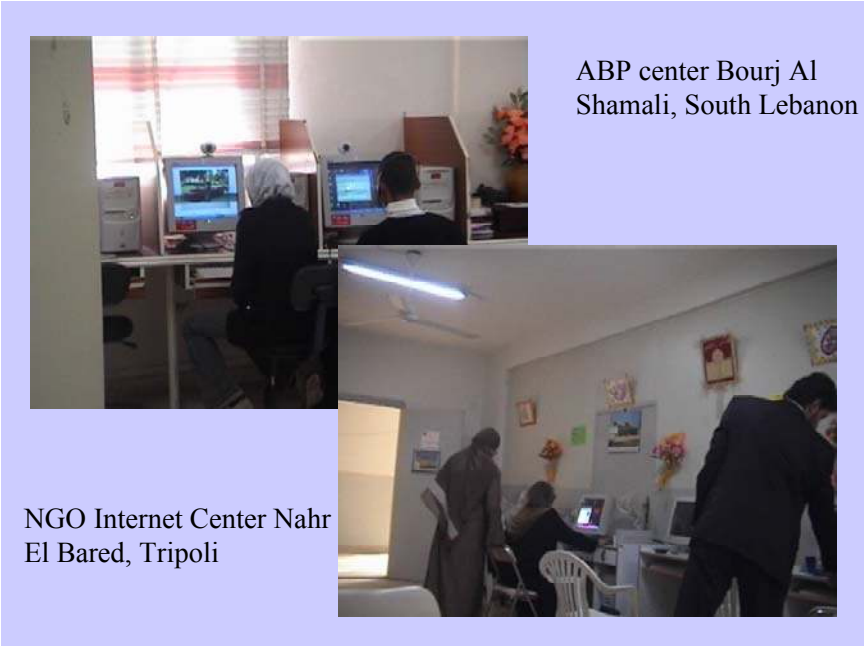
ABP center Bourj Al Shamali, South Lebanon

NGO Internet Center Nahr El Bared, Tripoli

Figure 23: Internet centres in Nahr al-Bared/Tripoli and Bourj al-Shamali/Sour
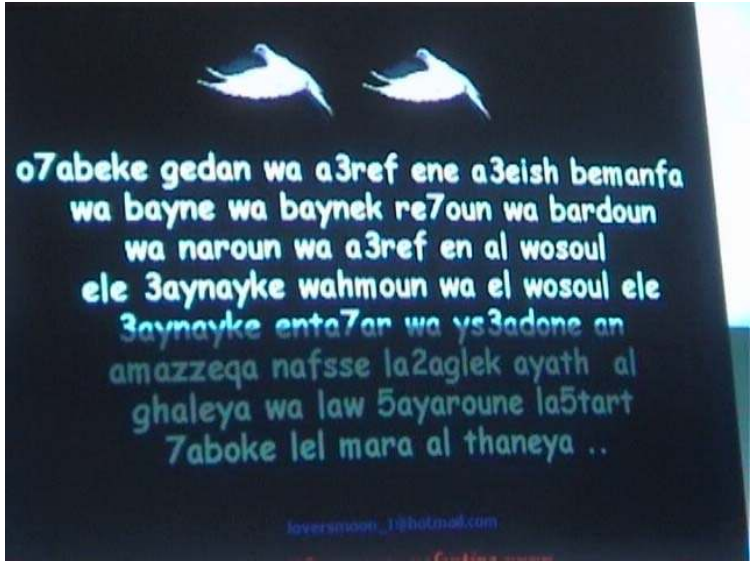
Figure 24: Poem received online by a girl in Nahr al-Bared/Tripoli. Internet users invent *cyberslang* or phonetic Arabic to ease communication

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Hamas Website

Figure 25: Hamas website as in 2002, and professionalized in 2006

Everyday Politics

Figure 26: *Visual/Virtual Rhetorics*: Poster in Bourj al-Barajne Camp IC *Inner Space*; and a similar image on a website

Figure 27: _Dying to live_ as website example of "Rehumanization" approach

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Qualitative Classification for Palestinian Websites during P@IP analysis

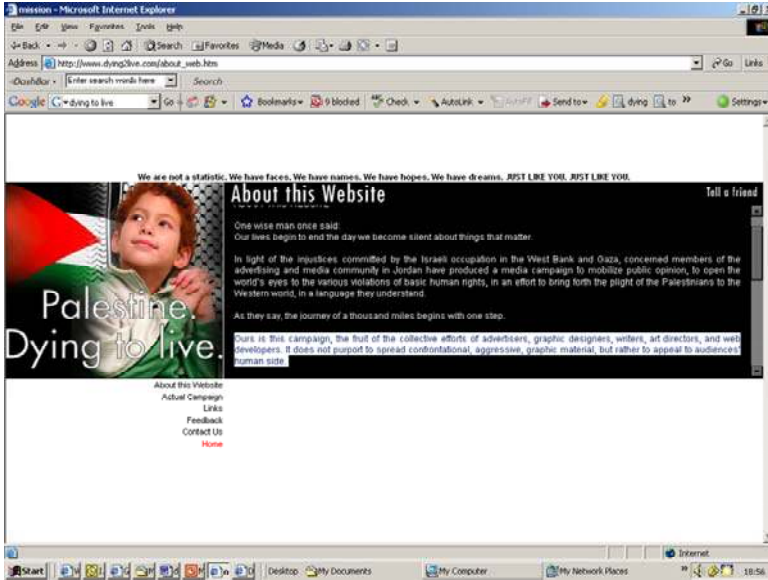| Content Markers		Owner or alignment	Location (where is the owner located?)	Issue orientation (if applicable that exist for one issue)	Focus (Is it purely Palestinian focused site or not in according to the material it presents?)	Intended audience		Primar Lang-uage	Web1 or Web 2	Notes 1	Note 2
Primary Content Marker	Secondary Content marker					Age group	Target audience				
Government International Org Embassy Political Social (NGO) Educational Business Religious New media (blog, forum) Entertainment News (formal	Political Social (NGO) Educational Business Religious New media (blog, forum) Entertainment News (formal)	Secular unaligned Religious Political NGO (name) Company (name) Media (name) New Media (say alignment or tendency – liberal, conservative, or open)	Country, town, camp	Single issue: [name issue] the Wall Gender, Right of return. Multiple issues [list issues in order, using comma as separator]	Palestinian - WB/G Palestinian - refugee Palestinian - diaspora Arab Islamic International Other: [state which]	Children (up top 12) Youth (up to teenage) Student Adult Older Adult	Domestic [WB/GZ Refugee Diaspora] Foreign [Int. com, Israeli, Arab, Islamic] Other: [state which]	English Arabic Hebrew French Russian Other [which] Multilin gual [which, using hyphen, in alphabe tical order]	Web 1 [static site] Web 2 choices are:Blog, Forum, Chat, Aggregator	Brief descript ion of these site	Dead site Stale site [not updated more than 6 month]

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Appendix 2: Url's received or used during fieldwork 2001-2005.

URL's from Fieldwork

http://www.miftah.org/

http://www.birzeit.edu/aff/

http://www.adalah.org/

http://www.addameer.org/

http://www.alhaq.org/

http://web.amnesty.org

http://arabhra.org

http://assoc40.oth/index_main.html/

http://www.badil.org

http://www.btselem.org

http://www.birzeit.edu/hrap

http://www.hrw.org/hrw/pubweb/Webcat-54.htm#P1050_145113

http://www.jcser.org

http://www.lawsociety.org

http://www.pchrgaza.org

http://www.phrmg.org
http://www.saint-yves.org

http://www.pal-watc.org

http://www.solidaritydesign.com
www.intifada.com

http://www.alaqsaintifada.org/

www.underash.net
www.rapprochement.org

www.abunimah.org

 www.arabmediawatch.com

http://www.caabu.org/press/letters/letters.html

http://www.mediachannel.org/

http://www.pmwatch.org/pmw/index.asp

http://afsc.org/ispal/statements.htm

http://www.nimn.org/

http://www.sustaincampaign.org

www.palsolidarity.org/

www.dying2live.com

http://birzeit.edu/palnews/war

http://www.addameer.org/september2000/

http://nigelparry.com/diary/

http://merip.org/new_uprising_primer/primer_all_text.html

http://www.sis.gov.ps/arabic/quds/quds_ar.html

http://www.sis.gov.ps/arabic/quds/quds_en.html

http://alaqsaintifada.org/

http://www.alhaq.org/frames_intifada2.html

http://www.amin.org/

http://www.merip.org/mer/mer217/mer217.html

http://www.birzeit.edu/

http://www.btselem.org/index.asp

http://www.pna.net/onground/index.htm

http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/eyetoeye/explore/crisis.html

http://www2.haaretz.co.il/special/mount-e/

http://www.elections.ps/english.aspx

http://www.pflp.ps/

http://www.hizbollah.tv/

http://www.palestine-info.com/hamas

http://www.shaml.org

http:// www.palesta.net

http://www.un.org/unrwa/

http://www.palestineremembered.com/

www.savethechildren.org.uk/

http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/MEPP/PRRN/prfront.html

http://www.iamapalestinian.com

http://www.al-awda.org/

http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/9836/dheisheh/

http://www.alkarmel.org/

http://alrowwad.freeservers.com/

http://www.ashtar-theatre.org/

http://www.baha-cartoon.net/index.html

http://www.bethlehem2000.org/

http://www.shorok.com/

http://www.gazavillage.com/

http://www.shammout.com/

http://www.palestinecostumearchive.org/

http://www.popularartcentre.org/

http://www.sanabel.ch/

http://www.sakakini.org/

http://www.palestinianpottery.com/

http://www.qattanfoundation.org/

http://www.east-jerusalem-ymca.org/

http://hanthala.virtualave.net/ali2.html

http://www.ramallahonline.com/

http://www.al-bireh.org/

http://www.nablus.org/

http://www.ramallah-city.org

http://www.sirreyeh.org/

http://www.afrp.org/

http://www.a-asa.org/

http://www.annadwa.org/

http://www.j-c-w.org/

http://www.jerusalemites.org/

http://www.amin.org/pages/khalil/

http://www.angelfire.com/il/badran

http://www.musabudeiri.freeserve.co.uk

http://www.amin.org/pages/dkuttab/

http://www.eyad.com

http://www.gcmhp.net/eyad/index.htm

http://www.assali.com/jti/raffi/

http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/Cabana/5029/

http://members.tripod.com/~palestinian_2/index.html

http://www.angelfire.com/pa/omr75/

http://grishmawi.webjump.com

http://www.zighari.com

http://www.alami.net/rani/

http://www.alami.net/~suhad/

http://www.mirc.co.uk/khaled/

http://www.geocities.com/SouthBeach/Lagoon/8522/

http://www.nigelparry.com

http://www.hanania.com/

http://www.palestine-net.com/palestine.html

http://www.amin.org/

http://www.bitterlemons.org/

http://home.birzeit.edu/outloud/

http://www.jmcc.org/

http://www.jmcc.org/media/reportonline

http://www.palestinemonitor.org/

http://meastwatch/meastwat.htm

http://www.al-ayyam.com

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http://www.alesteqlal.com

http://www.alquds.com/

http://www.odacation.org/alsabar/

http://www.alhayat-j.com/

http://bzu-mrc.org/

http://www.assenara.com/

http://www.kul-alarab.com/k672/

http://www.imemc.org

http://www.pnn.ps

http://www.english.wafa.ps

http://maannews.net

http://www.passia.org/

http://electronicintifada.net/

http://www.epalestine.com/

http://www.isoc.ps/

http://www.iapinfo.org

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/freepalestine/

http://www.hearpalestine.org/

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/solpalvol/

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/pal-actie

http://www.boycotisraeligoods.org

http://palsoft.com/

http://palsoft.com/

http://www.p-ol.com/

http://www.ramallahonline.com/

http://www.itouch-pal.com

http://www.intertech-pal.com

http://www.dheiseh-ibdaa.net

http://www.palishd.org

http://www.al-carma.com

http://www.shaml.org

http://www.ourjeruzalem.org

http://www.bahacartoon.net

http://www.futureinn.com

http://www.cactusy8.org

http://www.sabeel.org

http://armageddon.bizz.

www.pal9.com

http://fatriz.com

http://www.top100.com

http://www.nakba.org

http://www.rafah.vze.com

http://ezzedeen.net

http://www.fm-m.com

http://www.arabs48.com

http://www.pls48.net

http://www.arabynet.com

http://www.aljazeera.net

http://www.islamonline.net

http://www.gazapress.com

http://www.palestinesite.com

http://www.bahethcenter.org.

http://www.al-fatah.net

http://www.sabiroon.org

http://www.americaneagletears.com

http://www.poperefugeecamp.com

http://www.holyrock.org

http://www.enlighten-palestine.org/camps.html

http:/www.geometics.org.uk/gazasurvey.htm

http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/MEPP/PRRN/info/gaza.htm

http://www.birzeitsociety.org/

http://www.ej-ymca.org/site/

http://www.najialali.com/

http://www.jimena.org/

http://www.kul-alarab.com/

http://www.wafa.ps/arabic/

http://home.birzeit.edu/media/

http://www.alsabar-mag.com/

http://zmag.org/meastwatch/meastwat.cfm

http://www.al-ayyam.ps

http://www.palestinereport.org/

http://www.mirc.com/khaled/

http://www.watcpal.org/english/index.asp

http://musabudeiri.net/

http://www.daoudkuttab.com/

http://www.gazavillage.org/

http://www.bethlehem2000.org/cchp/index.shtml

Appendix 3: ICT Indicators for Palestine

Table 9: Basic ICT Indicators (1999-2004)[226]

	Gaza			West Bank			Palestinian Territories		
	1999	2004	Growth	1999	2004	Growth	1999	2004	Growth
Computer Ownership in households	9.6	22.5	134%	11.4	28.4	149%	10.8	26.4	144%
Satellite TV as % of TVs in household	29.7	77.3	160%	31.4	72.9	132%	30.9	74.4	141%
Internet at home (households)	4.7	7.8	66%	5.7	9.8	72%	5.4	9.2	70%
Availability of Mobile Phone in household	29.8	64.1	115%	51	77.6	52%	43.7	72.8	67%
T.V. in household	82.8	91.2	10%	92.3	94.6	2%	89.2	93.4	5%
Telephoneline (households)	36.5	36.5	0%	45	42.9	-5%	42.1	40.8	-3%

	Gaza		West Bank		All	
	1999	2004	1999	2004	1999	2004
Household OwnershipofComputers	9%	25.4%	11.4%	31.5%	10.8%	29.4%
Household Telephone Lines	36.5	39.7	45.0	44.8	42.1	43.0
Internet at Home	4.7	8.1	5.7	10.5	5.4	9.7
Cell Phone Use	29.8	64.1	51.0	77.6	43.7	72.8

Table 10: ICT Indicators in Palestinian Households 1999 and 2004[227]

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[226] Data from PCBS surveys for 1999 and 2004, analysed by Waked (2005).

[227] The numbers are derived from weighed samples in Zureik (2005c). Data for 2004 was taken from summary tables presented in a PCBS Press Release, *Computer, Internet and Mobile Phone Survey, 2004. Main Findings*, Ramallah, West Bank, December 2004, Table 1, page 8. Data for 1999 were obtained from the PCBS Press Release, *Results of the Visual Information Means and Computer Survey*, Ramallah West Bank, 2000, regarding a survey of 7559 households in the West Bank and Gaza concerning ownership of computers and access to the Internet www.pcbs.org.

Appendix 4: .ps reference of the three main Palestinian universities
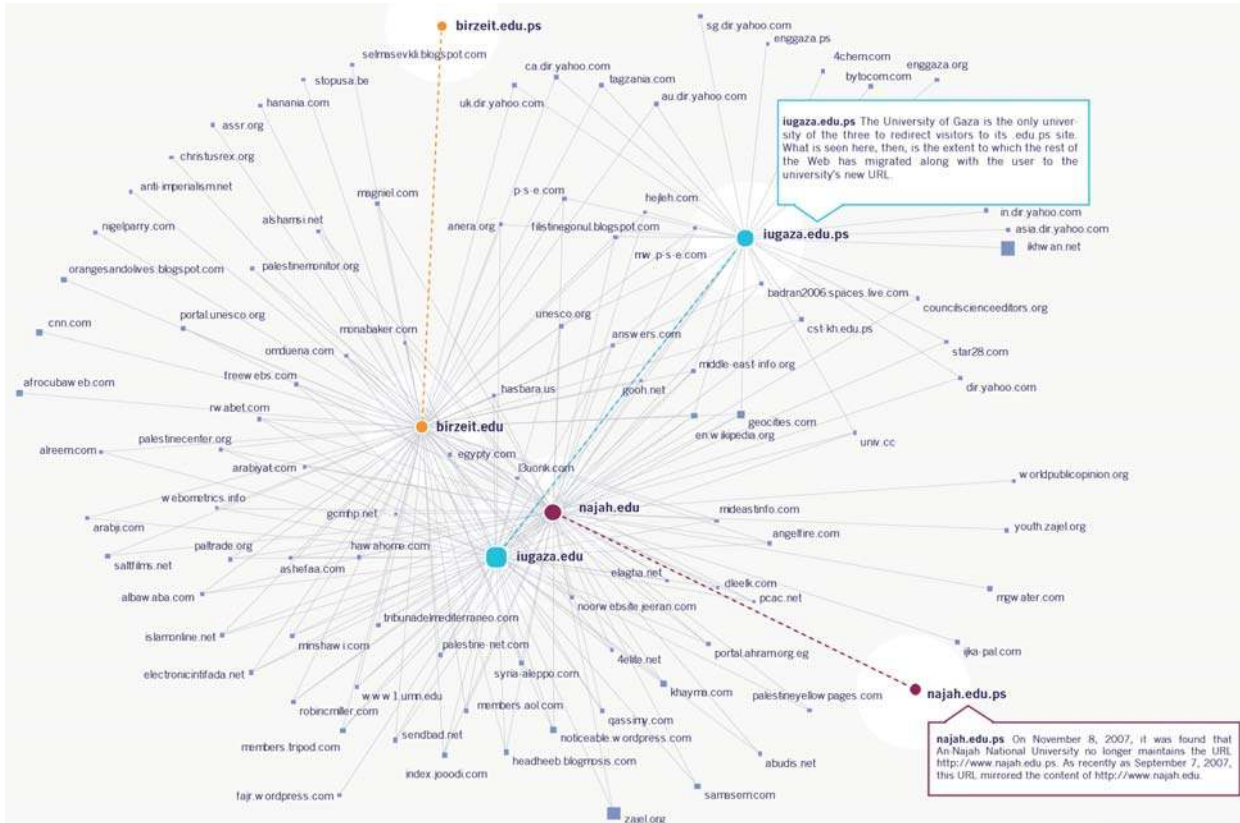
(The text box below refers to the upper-left axis of birzeit.edu.ps in above chart.)

birzeit.edu.ps Birzeit University mirrors the content of http://www.birzeit.edu on its .ps site (but does not redirect to it). Attempting to account for the lack of recognition of the .ps version of the site, researchers pointed to two explanations. Locally, there is the problem of updating link lists. This resurfaces at an aggregate level as well, since the top search engine returns for the queries "Birzeit" and "Birzeit university" are .edu pages rather than .edu.ps.

The fate of http://www.birzeit.edu.ps looks uncertain. Whereas it was found that Yahoo indexed thirteen links to the URL in September 2007, two months later the same query produces zero results.

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Summary

This study explores the creation of transnational linkages between Palestinian diaspora, the reconstruction of collective imaginations, and (local/transnational) political mobilization or activism through the prism of the internet. It is grounded in ethnographic research in (refugee) communities in Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon. Considering the complexities of such multisited and interdisciplinary research, and especially the urge to investigate 'from within', my analyses relied on qualitative/offline as well as quantitative/online methodologies. Fieldwork took place, off and on, between September 2001 and February 2004. This point in time coincided with a period when ICT began to be introduced on massive scales in the Arab world, when the Intifada was at its peak and the Israeli occupation increasingly dominated people's lives, and more political wars/uprisings erupted in the region.

Just before the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000 an important change occurred: the birth of the internet entailed a major transformation of communication and access to information for Palestinians. Furthermore, I was able to delineate some of the astounding new social/political possibilities of internet for a community under occupation and in exile. The inauguration of the PNA and its takeover of (part of) the telecom infrastructure and industry from Israel (as part of the 1993 Oslo Agreements), had an immediate impact on internet utilisation. The presence of post-Oslo returnees in the Occupied Palestinian Territories marked the birth of a professionalized ICT sector in Palestine in the late nineties. The research further evolved in a new historical phase when also the internal Palestinian political landscape was in great turmoil. Much changed after the death of President Yasser Arafat in 2004; the collapse of Fatah; and the subsequent election victory of Hamas. Along with the local and regional turmoil, internet usage further increased in this period. However, at the outset of this study I have addressed three contradictions that puzzled me, especially when embarking on ethnographic fieldwork to study the role of the internet in Palestinian context.

The overall research was captured in three tensions: mobility-immobility, space-place, resistance-oppression. Before engaging with these queries I first contextualised the themes and notions of this research. In *Chapter One* I offered theoretical and historical assessments. For research about the social/political impact of the internet in Palestine and the diaspora I build on earlier academic contributions regarding practices of political protest and mobilization and explored debates regarding the notion that 'new' media replaced 'old' styles of resistance. In *Chapter Two* I discussed the relevance of internet technology within wider media/social/economic frameworks. It was crucial to stress a dialectic approach in the analyses because despite the internet playing an important supportive role the everyday reality of Palestinian occupation proved that it cannot replace the face-to-face organisation and political struggle against (colonial) oppression. I found that the quality of internet was (like beauty) often in the eyes of the beholder. It was important to discuss the limitations of the 'utopian vs. dystopian' dichotomy about the politics of internet because different sides of the internet can be stressed depending on focus/interests. I

thus argue that internet might lead to submission as well as facilitate resistance, and I returned to this 'dialectics of internet' proposition in the final chapter.

The major problem facing Palestinians is the lack of freedom of movement, with both the flow of people and information strongly controlled. In Palestine, the internet is thus embedded in a colonial reality. Even after the Oslo peace agreements, Israel continued to stifle the information flow into and out of the Occupied Territories. *Chapter Three* presented this Palestinian immobility vis-à-vis virtual mobility (1st tension). Palestinian internet use clearly served a deeply felt need. Immobility and control was partly overcome when the internet enabled Palestinians to communicate with each other from different and previously unconnected places.

Several case studies showed that the internet provided different forms of entertainment which, considering the problems of isolation and alienation that many Palestinians suffer in the refugee camps, were also badly needed. More important than this 'virtual escapism'; direct (re)connection of the diaspora also *reinserted* refugees into Palestinian politics. Furthermore, although collective national identity does not do away with internal differences, a strongly politicised/collective participation was often observable. Online mobility and online interaction with text and images of Palestine strengthen the sense of commonality/shared values. In addition, this special *online* interaction helped uncovered the value of *offline* place and territory.

The act of communicating was itself very significant because it meant connecting Palestinians to each other; possible on this scale for the first time since 1948. The internet provided an important and long-desired meeting point, and in due course, redefined the relation between territorial place and virtual space (2nd tension). *Chapter Four* examined how virtual spaces relate to territorial place and for this I engaged in the debate about nation-state/collective identity. In fact, despite often assumed 'crises' of the nation-state and notions of 'de-territorialisation', these appeared important elements in the imagination of the Palestinian homeland and community. The content of transnational communication, online discussions, and the diasporic traversals, led to a new way of constructing/imagining Palestinian national identity. Meanwhile, direct contact also led to 'little scratches' in the collective imagined community and provoked a re-examination of the 'ideal' Palestinian nation and national unity. This was for example apparent in the disappointment felt by refugees in Lebanon who discovered that not all Palestinians in the Occupied Territories were concerned with the plight and rights of refugees in the host countries. Nevertheless, much of the interaction with or about Palestine in cyber space also nurtured those sentiments with a nationalist/unified character. The construction of an imagined community is thus a continuous process that is linked to class, politics and mobility, a process that can go two ways: strengthening and challenging ideal notions.

While online mobility re-constructed national identity, internet use impacted the dynamics of Palestinian social relations. *Cyber slang* for example increased the level of grassroots participation, and the discussed *Across Borders Project* a good example of how grassroots initiatives (virtually) shape an imagined Palestinian nation. While generating knowledge about the present, the internet helped recover the past. The way

destroyed villages were displayed online revived and reconfigured this memory. It meant that a refugee in Lebanon could finally come across a site about his or her original village in Palestine through for example *Palestine Remembered* website. The amalgam of internet examples resulted in a concrete connection of politics, media, the virtual and the real; and further reinforced the dialectic (offline/online) focus in this study.

The fragmented Palestinian nation was being reconfigured by chat, emailing, and internet projects in which the diaspora often participated. Websites became the mediating 'spaces' through which the Palestinian nation is often imagined. *Chapter Five* unravelled the relation between national identity, mobility, and internet developments through a study of Palestinian websites and other virtual representations. The growing use of internet motivated the emergence of hundreds of Palestinian websites, often with a strategic aim to *rehumanize* Palestinians in front of an international audience. I categorized the collected Palestinian websites and divided them into websites with *globalizing* and *localizing* tendencies. The technological leaps from 1996–2006 in Palestine have played an important role in this evolution as I outline in the *Palestinian Internet Time Table* (Table 1). An eminent public relations strategy towards Western audiences, the *Arabization* of the interface, the .PS URL, and the spreading of Palestinian blogs all contributed to the overall groundbreaking markers.

But I was especially curious to know about the trajectories and practices behind the websites, i.e. their *mode of operation,* for instance when I discovered that online representations are embedded in latent and manifested forms of control. Particular popular websites among Palestinians, such as Hamas (*Palestine-Info*), were hardly referred to by the well-known (globalizing) websites. The prevailing style of Palestinian websites was secular/national, but due to the negatively biased views about Islam/ism (fused by a 'politics of fear'/'guilty by association') the Palestinian online public sphere sometimes exemplifies a system of *exclusion*. Muslim/Islamist sources are sometimes considered a 'distraction' to the project of re-humanising Palestinians or mobilising international (i.e. Western) solidarity. Thus whereas offline/on the ground Hamas was clearly considered popular and sophisticated on the internet, social network analyses showed that online this was (initially) not acknowledged in terms of virtual linkages attributed to them by mainstream and globalizing websites.

The on the ground knowledge was especially possible through research in Internet Cafes, spaces/places that are at the crossroad of Palestinian internet and offline/online practices. *Chapter Six* investigated these important spaces and examined the everyday impacts of internet technologies in the diasporic contexts. Working in the camps also enabled me to see the (illegal) infrastructures and creative tapping of internet connection. But most importantly, these experiences showed me that ICT structures alter face-to-face participation of Palestinian internet users in internet cafes in particular. The ICs capture important aspects of the interlock between virtual and everyday life practices. I analysed the internet cafes as new offline public places. These new 'contested spaces" promote social change, especially when seen through the prism of gender. Processes of change and agency by participation of women impose

new interpretations, and evidently were best examined in their local setting. Internet users constantly trespass the social/dominant boundaries, for example by flirting online and arranging offline rendezvous or engaging in hacktivism. Information about sexuality was not (anonymously) available at this scale before. The same dynamic counts for possibilities to access/participate in political activities.

  Chapter Seven epitomized everyday resistance and the virtual Intifada through a political assessment of the internet (3rd tension). I portrayed how Palestinian political agency and struggle transcend into virtual reality. The competition over (potential) audiences (particularly in the West) is an important matter in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Dissemination of alternative information is therefore one of the most important political tools. A (more) independent journalism via internet media gave (pro-) Palestinian participants more democratic control over content and representation of news. I illustrated these tactical means of resistance by showing how Palestinians (try to) achieve their political demands through media activism via the internet, and the role Palestinian diasporas/solidarity activists play. This virtual agency is at the core of offline and online activist networks that mobilize in and/or for Palestine. I argue that internet technologies serve as part of the general Palestinian tools and repertoires of protest. Everyday internet resistance involves different levels varying from direct-action, media activism and solidarity projects; I have termed this blend of political engagement *Cyber Intifada.*

  Moreover, as closures and military repression limited the possibility to organize public gatherings in Palestine, online debates/mobilization emerged even more. The internet became part of the general resistance in three ways: to disseminate information, to organize protest, and to attack the opponent. *Hacktivism* and other virtual battles/attacks between (pro-) Palestinians and (pro-) Israelis, clearly signify the internet a technological tool and a political weapon. However, equating *Cyber Intifada* and internet activism with anti-colonial struggle or grassroots resistance is a bridge too far; and even more in the context of occupation and exile. In sum: internet utilisation helps to *contest* but also *assert* status-quo power. This was an important conclusion and it therefore demanded a more in depth examination, which I presented in the final chapter.

  Based on the increase of internet penetration rates and mushrooming internet cafes, the internet has become more 'normalised' than it was at the outset of the research in 2001. The case studies simultaneously highlight what internet means for a context that is still marked by Palestinian struggle for political self-determination and everyday survival. *Chapter Eight* therefore offered a critical conclusion about the potentials of the internet. The aim was to contribute to discussions regarding the politics of internet. I wanted to move beyond the general utopian/dystopian discourse that erupted from earlier internet research; my experiences finally made me see the internet as a *blessing and a curse.* This led to a dialectical (re)evaluation of the general pro's and con's of internet. Certain offline, on the ground, experiences cannot be transformed into virtual internet experiences, no matter how flashy or entertaining websites or internet games were; I also noticed that offline politics was crucial to

generate political commitment. For instance, whereas the construction of alternative political public spheres matured with the creation of discussion forums by popular political movements like Hamas and Fatah, it would not have been as interesting without the on the ground (successful) practices.

This emerging juxtaposition of the internet blessing and curse clarifies that internet politics witnessed an evolution from the somewhat *cool* internet activism with the 1990s Zapatista rebellion, to the post-9/11 context. A context that introduced a shift to more policing/monitoring (for example with the US Patriot Act) and use of the internet for surveillance and (preventive) attacks. On top of this rather general internet curse for activists, for Palestinians in particular, the Israeli occupation lead to greater difficulties and their forced exile severely hampers potential Palestinian grassroots resistance. In this paradoxical situation, I described the major internet blessing is the agency and space for *civil disobedience;* and the major curse what I metaphorically framed the *Damocles sword.* Thus the internet can be used for political activism, but sometimes (like a *Damocles* sword dangling above the computer) at the user's own risks due to political monitoring or counter hacking.

And still, the *Janus-faced* character of the internet continues to display the democratic potential and decentralising impact of internet tactics. The internet has opened new arenas of contestation and accommodating dissident groups. In spite of a pro-Israeli logic and PR in the dominant political/media structures, there is a shift in public opinion, partly thanks to media activism and their counter-hegemonic discourses. Conclusively, as the occupation of Palestine continues, and because social/human phenomena depend on social/human push and pull factors, this is an ongoing development with an indecisive/open end.

Samenvatting

Vanuit de focus van internet gebruik door Palestijnen richt dit onderzoek zich op nieuwe ontwikkelingen in transnationale relaties tussen de diaspora, de collectieve nationale verbeeldingen, en (lokale en transnationale) politieke mobilisatie/activisme. Het onderzoek is gesitueerd in een breed etnografisch spectrum, namelijk (vluchtelingen-)gemeenschappen in Palestina, Jordanië en Libanon. Vanwege de complexiteit van dergelijk interdisciplinair onderzoek in meervoudige locaties, maar vooral door mijn wens kennis 'van binnenuit' op te doen, zijn de analyses gebaseerd op zowel kwalitatieve/offline als kwantitatieve/online methoden. Etnografisch veldwerk vond met tussenpozen plaats tussen september 2001 en februari 2004. Deze periode viel samen met een tijd waarin ICT net op grote schaal haar intrede deed in de Arabische wereld; terwijl de Intifada op haar hoogtepunt was, en de Israëlische bezetting vergaande gevolgen had voor het alledaagse leven van Palestijnen; en er nog meer politieke opstanden/oorlogen in het Midden-Oosten lost barstten.

Vlak voor het uitbreken van de Al-Aqsa-Intifada (Tweede Intifada) op 29 september 2000 vond een cruciale verandering plaats: de opkomst van het internet bracht voor Palestijnen belangrijke transformaties teweeg in de wijze waarop ze communiceren en toegang tot informatie hebben. Voor een gemeenschap onder bezetting en in ballingschap, representeert dit een aantal krachtige sociaal/politieke mogelijkheden van het internet. De installatie van de PNA (Palestijnse Nationale Autoriteit) en haar (gedeeltelijke) overname van de telecominfrastructuur en industrie van Israël (als onderdeel van de Oslo-akkoorden van 1993) had een onmiddellijke impact op het internetgebruik. De aanwezigheid van Palestijnen die na Oslo waren teruggekeerd markeerde de geboorte van een professionele ICT-sector in de Palestijnse Bezette Gebieden eind jaren '90. Mijn onderzoek ontspon zich verder in een nieuw historische fase waarbij het interne Palestijnse politieke landschap in grote consternatie verkeerde. Er is veel veranderd na de dood van president Yasser Arafat in 2004, zoals de crisis van Fatah en de verkiezingsoverwinning van Hamas, en als gevolg hiervan de verlammende politiek/economische boycot door de internationale gemeenschap. Tijdens deze nationale en regionale beroering groeide het internetgebruik gestaag door. Aan het begin van de dissertatie heb ik echter drie tegenstellingen uiteengezet van zaken die me verbaasden toen ik met veldwerk begon in de specifieke Palestijnse context.

Drie spanningsvelden (*tensions*) vormden de rode draad in het onderzoek: mobiliteit/immobiliteit, space (virtuele ruimte)/place (territoriale ruimte) en opstand/onderdrukking. Maar voor ik hier op inging heb ik eerst de thema's en stellingen van het onderzoek in een breder context geplaatst en in *Hoofdstuk Een* mijn theoretische en historische inschattingen gegeven. Voor mijn onderzoek naar de sociale/politieke impact van het internet in Palestina en de diaspora heb ik voortgebouwd op eerder onderzoek naar praktijken van politiek protest/politieke mobilisatie, en de notie dat 'nieuwe' media de 'oude' vormen van verzet hebben vervangen kritisch onderzocht. In *Hoofdstuk Twee* heb ik verder in het kader van

bredere analyses van media, maatschappij en economie de relevantie van internettechnologie onderzocht. Het was van groot belang in de analyses de nadruk te leggen op een dialectische aanpak omdat de alledaagse realiteit van de Palestijnse bezetting aantoonde dat het internet, hoewel het een belangrijke ondersteunende rol speelt, geen vervanging kan zijn voor face-to-face organisatie en politieke strijd tegen (koloniale) onderdrukking. Ik kwam er achter dat de kwaliteit van het internet (zoals schoonheid) vaak door het oog van de beschouwer bepaald wordt. Het was van belang de beperkingen van de 'utopisch' versus 'dystopisch' dichotomie aan de orde te stellen omdat met betrekking tot de politiek van het internet nu eenmaal, naar gelang focus/belang, verschillende aspecten van het internet benadrukt kunnen worden. Mijn stelling is dat het internet kan leiden tot onderwerping, maar ook verzet kan faciliteren, en in het laatste hoofdstuk keerde ik terug naar deze 'dialectiek van het internet'.

Het belangrijkste probleem waarmee Palestijnen geconfronteerd worden is een gebrek aan bewegingsvrijheid maar naast mensen wordt ook de stroom van informatie sterk gecontroleerd. Het internet is voor Palestijnen duidelijk ingebed in een koloniale realiteit. Zelfs na de Oslo-vredesakkoorden bleef Israël de informatiestroom van en naar de Bezette Gebieden belemmeren. *Hoofdstuk Drie* beschrijft deze Palestijnse immobiliteit vs. mobiliteit (*eerste tension*). Het gebruik van internet door de Palestijnen beantwoordde duidelijk aan een diep gevoelde behoefte. Immobiliteit werd deels overwonnen toen het internet Palestijnen in staat stelden met elkaar te communiceren vanuit verschillende, voordien niet met elkaar verbonden, plaatsen.

Onderzoek gaf ook aam dat het internet verschillende vormen amusement/afleiding biedt die hard nodig waren gezien de problemen van isolatie en vervreemding die waarvan Palestijnen in de vluchtelingenkampen te lijden hebben. Naast dit 'virtuele escapisme' gaf de directe (her)aansluiting van de diaspora de Palestijnse vluchtelingen tevens een prominenter plek in de Palestijnse politiek. Bovendien was, hoewel een collectieve nationale identiteit interne verschillen niet opheft, vaak een sterk gepolitiseerde/collectieve participatie waar te nemen. Online mobiliteit, en online interactie met tekst en beelden van/door Palestina, versterken het gevoel van gemeenschappelijkheid/gedeelde waarden. Tegelijkertijd heeft die bijzondere online interactie de waarde blootgelegd van de offline/territoriale dimensie.

Ook de wijze van communiceren zelf was van groot belang omdat Palestijnen nu *met elkaar* werden verbonden, voor het eerst mogelijk sinds 1948 op deze schaal. Het internet bood een belangrijk en lang gewenst ontmoetingspunt en herdefinieerde na verloop van tijd de relatie tussen territoriale en virtuele ruimte (*tweede tension*). In *Hoofdstuk Vier* wordt onderzocht hoe deze virtuele ruimtes relateren aan de territoriale ruimtes. Hier ga ik in op het debat over natiestaat en collectieve identiteit. Want hoewel er vaak wordt uitgegaan van 'crises' van de natiestaat en begrippen als 'de-territorialisering', zijn dit cruciale elementen in de verbeelding van het Palestijnse thuisland en de Palestijnse gemeenschap. De (inhoud van de) transnationale communicaties via online discussies en het overbruggen van de

territoriale verdeeldheid leiden tot een nieuwe manier om de nationale identiteit te construeren/verbeelden. Daarnaast nam ik waar dat rechtstreeks contact ook leidde tot 'krasjes' in de vaak ideale verbeelde gemeenschap. Dat bleek bijvoorbeeld uit de teleurstelling van vluchtelingen in Libanon, die ontdekten dat niet alle Palestijnen in de Bezette Gebieden betrokken waren bij de benarde toestand van vluchtelingen in de ontvangende landen, en leidde op haar beurt weer tot herdefiniering van de 'ideale' Palestijnse gemeenschap. Desondanks voedde de intense interactie met/over Palestina in cyberspace ook het nationale/verenigd karakter van de Palestijnse identiteit. De (re)constructie van een verbeelde gemeenschap is daarom een doorlopend proces dat gerelateerd is aan klasse, politiek en mobiliteit. Een dergelijk proces kan twee kanten op gaan: het versterken of juist ter discussie stellen van ideale noties.

Terwijl online mobiliteit de nationale identiteit reconstrueerde, veranderde internet ook de dynamiek van sociale relaties. *Cyberslang* als makkelijke internet taal leidde bijvoorbeeld tot een toename in participatie van onderaf en het grassroots *Across Borders Project* initiatief droeg *virtueel* bij aan de vorming en verbeelding van de Palestijnse natie. Het internet leverde niet alleen kennis op over het heden, maar droeg ook bij aan het herleven/ophalen van het verleden. De manier waarop verwoeste dorpen online werden getoond leidde ertoe dat deze herinneringen opnieuw tot leven werden gebracht en werden gevormd. Het hield in dat bijvoorbeeld door de website *Palestine Remembered* een vluchteling in Libanon eindelijk een website kon vinden over zijn of haar dorp in Palestina. De samensmelting van deze internet cases verbindt politiek, nieuwe media, het virtuele/alledaagse, dit bekrachtigde tevens de dialectische focus (offline/online) van dit onderzoek.

De gefragmenteerde Palestijnse gemeenschap werd bijeengebracht door chatten, e-mailen, e.a. internetprojecten waaraan de diaspora deelnam. Websites werden *mediating spaces* om de Palestijnse natie vorm te geven. *Hoofdstuk Vijf* ontwart de relatie tussen nationale identiteit, mobiliteit en internetontwikkelingen door Palestijnse websites en andere virtuele representaties te volgen. Het toenemende internetgebruik motiveerde de opkomst van honderden Palestijnse websites met vaak als strategische doel de ontmenselijking van Palestijnen tegen te gaan (*rehumanization*). Ik heb de getraceerde websites in opgedeeld in websites met een *globalizing* en *localizing* karakter. De baanbrekende technologische ontwikkelinge tussen 1996 en 2006 in Palestina hebben een belangrijke rol gespeeld in deze ontwikkelingen, zoals ik laat zien in een tijdsschema (Tabel 1). Dus een goede pr-strategie gericht op Westerse doelgroepen; het *Arabiseren* van internet interface; het verkrijgen van de Palestijnse *.ps* URL; en de toename van Palestijnse blogs, hebben allemaal bijgedragen aan de baanbrekende veranderingen.

Maar ik was bovenal benieuwd naar de methoden en praktijken achter de websites en de manier waarop ze opereerden. Hierbij ontdekte ik dat online representaties ingebed zijn in latente en manifeste vormen van macht. Naar populaire websites onder Palestijnen (zoals van Hamas) werd door de bekende (*globalizing*) websites nauwelijks verwezen. De gangbare stijl van Palestijnse websites was seculier/nationaal, maar door het bestaan van negatieve vooroordelen over de islam

(in samenhang met *politiek van de angst en 'guilt by association'*) is de Palestijnse online publieke ruimte soms een voorbeeld van een systeem van uitsluiting. Islamitische of islamistische bronnen werden soms beschouwd als 'afleiding' van de *rehumanization* doel en het mobiliseren van internationale (Westerse) solidariteit. Zo kon het dat Hamas offline/in de praktijk werd beschouwd als populair en *sophisticated* op het internet, maar uit sociale netwerk analyses tussen 'gevestigde' website en Hamas bleek dat dit online (middels virtuele links naar elkaar) aanvankelijk niet erkend werd.

Deze praktijkkennis werd vooral mogelijk gemaakt door onderzoek in internetcafés. *Hoofdstuk Zes* belicht de belangrijke *spaces* die zich op het kruispunt van offline/online praktijk bevinden en analyseert de dagelijkse impact van internettechnologieën in de context van de diaspora. Werken in de vluchtelingen kampen stelde me ook in staat de (illegale) infrastructuren en het creatieve aftappen van internetverbindingen te zien. Het was belangrijk om te kunnen zien dat, vooral in/door internet cafés, internet/ICT structuren dus ook de *face-to-face* participatie van Palestijnse internetgebruikers veranderen. Internet cafés omvatten belangrijke aspecten van de samenhang tussen virtuele en alledaagse ervaringen en daarbij behorende praktijken. Ik zie internetcafés als nieuwe offline publieke ruimten. Deze nieuwe *'contested spaces'* bevorderen, vooral uit het gezichtspunt van *gender,* maatschappelijke verandering. Veranderingsprocessen door bijvoorbeeld de nieuwe participatie van (jonge) vrouwen kunnen duidelijk het best in hun plaatselijke setting onderzocht worden en vereisen andere/nieuwe interpretaties. Internetgebruikers overtreden voortdurend de (dominante) sociale grenzen, bijvoorbeeld door online te flirten en offline afspraakjes te maken, of door over te gaan tot *hacktivism*. (Anoniem) informatie over seksualiteit was nog niet eerder op deze schaal beschikbaar. Ongeveer hetzelfde zag ik bij de mogelijkheden om toegang te krijgen tot, en deel te nemen aan, politieke activiteiten.

Hoofdstuk Zeven gaat over politieke beoordeling van het internet en betreft het dagelijkse verzet en virtuele Intifada (*derde tension*). Ik laat zien hoe Palestijnse politieke *agency* en strijd weerspiegeld worden in de virtuele realiteit. De concurrentie over een (potentieel) publiek is een belangrijk onderdeel van het Palestijns-Israëlische conflict. Het verspreiden van (alternatieve) informatie is daarom een van de belangrijkste politieke methoden. Onafhankelijke(r) journalistiek via internetmedia gaf (pro)Palestijnse deelnemers meer democratische controle over de inhoud en de representatie van het nieuws. Ik illustreer deze tactische verzetsmiddelen door te laten zien hoe Palestijnen hun politieke eisen door media-activisme via het internet (proberen te) realiseren, en ga in op de rol van de Palestijnse diaspora en activisten uit de solidariteitsbeweging. Deze virtual agency is centraal voor offline en online netwerken van activisten die voor Palestina mobiliseren. Ik betoog dat internettechnologieën fungeren als onderdeel van de instrumenten en repertoires van het Palestijnse verzet. Maar deze vorm van verzet vindt plaats op verschillende niveaus, variërend van directe-actie, media-activisme en solidariteitsprojecten. Ik heb deze melange van engagement *Cyber Intifada* genoemd.

Naarmate grensafsluitingen en militaire repressie de mogelijkheid om in Palestina publieke bijeenkomsten te organiseren beperkten, zijn online debatten en mobilisaties nog belangrijker geworden. Het internet werd op drie manieren onderdeel van het bredere verzet: verspreiden van informatie, organiseren van protest, en seboteren van de tegenstander. *Hacktivism,* aanvallen en sabotages tussen (pro)Palestijnen en (pro)Israëli's, geeft duidelijk aan dat het internet zowel een technologisch instrument als een politiek wapen is. Het is echter een brug te ver cyber-Intifada en internetactivisme gelijk te stellen aan antikoloniale strijd verzet van onderaf. Samenvattend: internetgebruik helpt de gevestigde orde te *verdedigen* en te *bestrijden*. Dat was een belangrijke conclusie, en des te noodzakelijker in de context van bezetting en ballingschap. Daarom vereiste ze dieper onderzoek.

Door de toename van de internetpenetratie en de explosieve stijging van het aantal internetcafés is het internet nu meer 'genormaliseerd' dan in 2001, bij het begin van het onderzoek. De *case studies* tonen aan wat het internet betekent in een context die nog steeds bepaald wordt door de Palestijnse strijd om politieke zelfbeschikking te bereiken en van dag tot dag te overleven. *Hoofdstuk Acht* biedt daarom een kritische conclusie over het potentieel van het internet. Het doel is bij te dragen aan discussies over de politiek van het internet. Ik wilde voorbij het algemene utopisch/dystopische vertoog komen dat uit eerder onderzoek naar het internet naar voren kwam. Door mijn ervaringen ging ik het internet uiteindelijk zien als zowel een *zegen* als een *vloek*. Dat heeft geleid tot een dialectische (her)waardering van de algemene voor- en nadelen van het internet. Bepaalde offline ervaringen in de praktijk kunnen niet omgezet worden in virtuele interneteraringen, hoe flitsend websites of entertaining internetgames ook kunnen zijn. Ik heb ook gemerkt dat offline politiek cruciaal was om politiek engagement te bereiken. Zo kwam de constructie van alternatieve publieke ruimtes tot wasdom met het opzetten van discussieforums door populaire politieke bewegingen als Hamas and Fatah; die zouden echter niet zo interessant zijn geweest zonder (succesvolle) activiteiten in de praktijk.

Deze nevenschikking van zegen en vloek van het internet maakt duidelijk dat internetpolitiek een evolutie heeft ondergaan van een min of meer *cool* internetactivisme met de Zapatista-opstand van de jaren negentig, tot de harde post-9/11 politieke context. Die context gaf aanleiding tot een overgang naar meer bewaking/controle (bijvoorbeeld met de *Patriot Act*) en het gebruik van het internet voor surveillance en (preventieve) aanvallen. Zo bleek het internet in algemene zin een vloek voor activisten. Daarnaast leidde de Israëlische bezetting specifiek voor Palestijnen tot grotere moeilijkheden. Hun gedwongen ballingschap belemmert potentieel Palestijns verzet aan de basis in belangrijke mate. Toch blijft het internet met zijn Januskop het democratisch potentieel en de decentraliserende impact van internettactieken tonen. Het internet heeft nieuwe strijdtonelen geopend en plaats geboden aan dissidente groepen. Ondanks de pro-Israëlische logica en pr in de dominante structuren van politiek en media, is er een verschuiving in de publieke opinie, die deels te danken is aan het media-activisme en zijn contrahegemonische vertogen. Samenvattend: in de paradoxale situatie die hierboven geschetst werd, is de

belangrijkste zegen van het internet de agency en space voor *Burgerlijke Ongehoorzaamheid (Civil Disobedience)*. De belangrijkste vloek is wat ik omschrijf als het zwaard van *Damocles*. Omdat de bezetting van Palestina voortduurt en maatschappelijke verschijnselen afhangen van sociale (menselijke) push en pullfactoren, is dit een voortdurende ontwikkeling, met een onbeslist en open einde.