Downloaded from UvA-DARE, the institutional repository of the University of Amsterdam (UvA)
http://dare.uva.nl/document/127785

File ID	127785
Filename	Chapter 5 Mankoub : narrative fragments of an ongoing catastrophe

SOURCE (OR PART OF THE FOLLOWING SOURCE):

Type	Dissertation
Title	Telling memories : Al-Nakba in Palestinian exilic narratives
Author	I.A.M. Saloul
Faculty	Faculty of Humanities
Year	2009
Pages	250

FULL BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS:
http://dare.uva.nl/record/298203

Copyright

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other then for strictly personal, individual use.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (http://dare.uva.nl)

CHAPTER FIVE

Mankoub: Narrative Fragments of an Ongoing Catastrophe

When I embarked on this study, I started with two main questions. The first concerned the ways in which the concept of *al-nakba* is articulated in different Palestinian cultural media; namely, literary and audiovisual narratives. The second concerned the presence of *al-nakba* in the fabric of contemporary Palestinian everyday life. For this second question, I intended to complement my analysis of literary and audiovisual narratives with an analysis of how perceptions of the loss of homeland are transmitted through oral narratives from one generation to the next within different geopolitical communities of exiled Palestinians. In the past four chapters of this study, I have addressed the first question.

Having come to my closing chapter on oral narratives, I realize that my idea to conduct academic research that equally addresses both concerns has been thematically ambitious, and has proved to be almost a "mission impossible". The matter is simple. In bringing these two questions together, my aim was to study contemporary Palestinian identity by crossing the disciplinary boundaries between two seemingly disconnected fields of research: literary theory, especially narratology, and cultural anthropology. While the former discipline entails close readings of narratives at home, so to speak, the latter is grounded ultimately in *travel*: the combined project would require the ability of the analyst to cross physical boundaries and political borders. If I were to draw a conclusion about the difference between both disciplines, based on my experience with travel as a Palestinian, then my conclusion would be that anthropology is a practice that is destined *only* for those who can travel, hence not for Palestinians. This is so, because to be a Palestinian in exile today means to be essentially deprived of the right to travel (physically) and to be denied access to places – especially the place which the subject desires most and where he or she ought to be: Palestine.

In spite of this conclusion, I remain unwilling to give up the link between my research and everyday reality. Therefore I have devised the following solution. I will use fragments of my personal experience with travel, limited as it is condemned to be, to indicate how Palestinian narratives of identity are composed of the countless stories of what takes place in a state of suspension. I am in good company here. Rashid Khalidi, in his book *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, describes the condition of

lacking a recognized passport, of being treated as a "suspicious object" at international crossing points, of being questioned and interrogated, all as distinctive acts of "othering" through which the articulation of Palestinian identity is constructed and reinforced. According to Khalidi, it takes only a minute observation of the concrete practices of exclusion at airports, borders, and checkpoints that Palestinians undergo on a daily basis to make clear what it means to be a Palestinian subject today (1997: 1). My experience has been the same.

Given this impaired condition of travel, in this chapter I limit my analysis to the narratives that I managed to collect during a visit to the Gaza Strip in 2004. This was my first and, to date, the only trip back home that I have been able to make after I left Palestine to pursue my graduate studies in 2000. The plan to document this trip on video partly failed due to the typical circumstance that at Cairo Airport I was arrested, separated from the cameramen who were to accompany me, and then deported.[102] Yet, I was still able to document conversations with Palestinians living in Gaza. The second source with which I supplement this scant material consists of *nakba* narratives I uncoverd during my search of internet sources.[103]

My discussion of these narratives revolves around two different issues. First, I reflect on the temporal orientation of the narratives in terms of the event of *al-nakba* between the past and the present. Second, I locate various references to Palestinian cultural identity in relation to the fragmented generational and spatial distribution of Palestinian society across geopolitical contexts: exiled Palestinians inside historical Palestine, both in Israel and in the occupied territories, and outside, mainly in the Arab world. Here, I will focus my discussion on notions such as loss of home, the return to the homeland, and the memory of *al-nakba* in the everyday life of Palestinian exiles.

It is worth mentioning that in my treatment of these narratives I will refer to the speakers' identity and give full names only when the speakers identified themselves publicly. In other cases the identity of the speakers will be indicated by first names only. As I write these words on the technical aspects of my analysis of the narratives, I am aware of the

---

[102] A personal so much as a professional fragment of my limited experience with travel and movement, both as a Palestinian and as academic, can be seen in the film entitled *Access Denied* (2005). This thirty minute documentary, produced by *Cinema Suitcase*, shows some of the difficult circumstances I encountered during my visit to the Gaza Strip in 2004 which I planned in order to meet my family but primarily to collect research material on oral narratives of Palestinians for this chapter. *Access Denied* runs with the metaphors of travel and failed encounters between people in order to make a case for a meditative reflection on the intercultural encounter between Arabic and Western individuals eager, but not always able, to understand each other.

[103] For a recent and useful study on the role of the internet as an instrument of Palestinian media-activism and struggle to establish a virtual community, see Aouragh (2008).

symbolic value of the words "identity" and "name". The Palestinian experience of loss of homeland and exile, as we have seen in the previous chapters, is that of a people who strive to keep their names and to find recognition and acceptance for them. However, needless to say here that refraining from mentioning the full names of the speakers is justified also by the fact that, in the Palestinian experience, one simply never knows who is listening. And if they do listen, you never know how they listen and what they do with what they listen to, not to mention what they might do with the speaking subject him- or herself. Hence, while having to reiterate the theft of identity perpetrated on Palestinians, my enforced deletion of full names responds to the political situation thus created.

I begin here by briefly discussing oral narratives of *al-nakba* in relation to ethnographic approaches to reading these accounts. In this section, I also propose a different mode of reading these accounts, namely as narratives. Then, I will analyze a collection of personal accounts that were published by the *Journal of Palestine Studies* on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of *al-nakba* in 1998. Entitled "Reflections on Al-Nakba", this collection includes stories of Palestinians from different walks of life, who all tell what the event of *al-nakba* means to them personally. By calling these narratives "stories", I do not mean to imply they are fictional. Instead, I want to stress that these personal accounts can be read as "narratives" rather than historical or anthropological evidence.[91] This approach, I will argue below, gives them more autonomy as texts or utterances, and more complexity of form and content, together. After that I will move on to analyze a selection of the narratives that I collected in my fieldwork in Gaza in 2004, including my own position in that fieldwork. In conclusion, I will draw several parallels between the different aspects of Palestinian exilic identity and trans-generational transmission of memory of *al-nakba* articulated by these personal accounts.

Ethnography as Narrative

In the absence of state archives and the official apparatus of an independent Palestinian state, and since many Palestinians from the first generation of exiles are illiterate, oral history has become, especially in the last two decades, a significant mode for both archiving and

[91] The personal accounts in "Reflections on Al-nakba" are oral narratives written down. The reason I call them "oral narratives" in the first place is related to the dynamics through which they were told and written. In its introduction to the narratives, the *Journal of Palestine Studies* points out that it "asked these Palestinians to write down short pieces in which they tell" what *al-nakba* means to them today. Because these people were asked to tell their stories, I refer to their status as oral narratives. See "Reflections on Al-Nakba" (1998: 5-35).

sustaining Palestinian cultural memory in the present. The cultural transmission of the memory of *al-nakba* often takes place orally through oral performances and commemorative practices in fragmentary moments that give texture to the fabric of everyday life.[92]

It almost goes without saying that oral histories are always subjective narratives of the past that have meaning for the people who narrate them as much as for those they are about. Almost, but not quite; for what exceeds the subjective nature of their storytelling is the common political backdrop against which this subjectivity is shaped. Most of the anthropological literature dealing with the oral history of *al-nakba*, however, rarely goes beyond mere ethnographic description of the historical event: the recounting of political and military activities and the subsequent social transformations in Palestine.[93]

Ethnographic approaches to the 1948 *nakba* are problematic in that they often remain locked within what can be called a narrative about a history of identity. In other words, while the ethnographic approach has offered an important means to unearth concrete evidence and information *about* the historical expulsion of Palestinians, it often paid little attention to *how* the "uprooting" itself makes the narratives produced by the Palestinian subject meaningful to this subject's everyday condition of displacement and exile. To put it differently, the question scantly asked is how does the Palestinian subject's narrative of the *nakba* of 1948 affect our understanding of his or her narration of the ongoing catastrophe of the Palestinians in 2008?

To answer this question, I wish to put forward an alternative mode of reading oral accounts of *al-nakba*. Instead of treating them as ethnographic fieldwork notes, I treat them as literary and audiovisual narratives; namely as *narratives in exile*. I do so not to privilege narratology as an approach to ethnography. Rather, I argue that "the subject of the everyday",

---

[92] In this context, different attempts such as conducting oral history projects, the writing of memoirs by intellectuals and politicians and developing rituals of commemoration were made in order to preserve the past and to convey what happened in 1948 to second and third generations of post-*nakba* Palestinians who have not experienced the originating event of *al-nakba*. For several listings, documents and resources on Palestinian historiography of *al-nakba*, especially oral history projects both inside Palestine and outside it, see, for example, the following initiatives by non-governmental organizations: *BADIL* (Resource Center of Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights), http://www.badil.org; *Palestine Remembered*, http://www.palestineremembered.com; and *Nakba Archive*, http://www.nakba-archive.org/index.htm. Also, for relevant and more focused academic publications on this subject, see Abu Sitta (2004), Sanbar (2001: 87-94), Slyomovics (1995: 41-54 and 1998), Swedenburg (1991: 152-79 and 1995), and Farah (2002: 24-27 and 2003: 20-23).

[93] It is worth adding here that while recent historiography of Palestinian catastrophe has shown a growing awareness of the importance of recording the events of 1948 from the perspective of those previously marginalized in nationalist narratives – peasants, women, camp refugees, poorer city dwellers, and Bedouin tribes – there is still little documentation on *al-nakba* as experienced and remembered by the non-elite majority of Palestinian society. For a very useful critique of the problematics of ethnographic approaches to *al-nakba* and of social science research on Palestine in general, see Tamari (1994: 69-86 and 1997: 17-40).

regardless of disciplinary perspective, needs to be posed continuously as the question at the heart of any narrative about the condition of Palestinian exile. Posed as a question, the idea of "the subject of the everyday" can help us not only to refine disciplinary modes of reading exilic narratives at the level of historical representation, but also to supply insights at the level of these narratives' depiction of current affairs. What characterizes this mode of reading is a shift of focus from the historical event itself (its pastness) to the subject of this event and his or her everyday condition. In other words, rather than referring to *al-nakba* (1948), I will mobilize what I call here the contemporary *mankoub*. This term refers to the "catastrophed" subject. I take this subject as my focal point for a reading of the narratives.

At the heart of this narrative mobilization of the *mankoub* is the point that, like literary and audiovisual narratives, oral accounts of the catastrophic loss of homeland evoke cultural imaginings (or "imagings") that provide necessary frameworks to understand the reach and the scope of Palestinian exile in the everyday. This conceptualization is grounded in a specific reading of narratives in exile not simply as autobiographies, but as memories. As I argue below, reading the oral narratives as memories depends on a crucial distinction between autobiographical and memorial modes of storytelling of exilic identities. In the Palestinian case, this distinction is necessary, and runs on the assumption that autobiographical narrative risks the pitfall of promoting an individualized sense of subjectivity, whereas the memorial mode destabilizes such a sense of identity in terms of an event/subject constellation between the past and present experiences of catastrophe.

In order to explore this memorial mode of reading of oral narratives of *al-nakba*, I now turn to the collection "Reflections on Al-Nakba". This collection is composed of the narratives of Mamdouh Nofal, Fawaz Turki, Haider Abdel Shafi, Inea Bushnaq, Yazid Sayigh, Shafiq al-Hout, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, and Musa Bueiri. With the exception of Yazid Sayigh whose narrative represents second and third generation of post-*nakba* Palestinians, all of these speakers belong to the first generation of Palestinians who lived through the 1948 *nakba*. In my analysis of this collection, I will read in particular the narratives of Mamdouh Nofal, Fawaz Turki, and Yazid Sayigh. I focus on these three stories in particular because of the thematic and temporal connections between them and the collection as a whole.

As I have indicated, I read these stories not as historical eyewitness accounts, but as memories of life trajectories that imagine what the catastrophe means to the speakers in their everyday of exile. In each of these stories, memory articulates what in one way or another has been left behind, and thus they practice a sometimes-compulsive retrovision. What interests me here is how the Palestinian subject's voice engenders the exilic discourse, how memory

shapes the exile's meanings, desires and needs of and for home, and how the narrative configuration that results can be read as relevant for the Palestinians' struggle to overcome their forced exile and return home. Hence, my reading emphasizes the present-day cultural rather than the historical significance of these narratives. Only when this aspect of the narratives of *al-nakba* is taken into account can we grasp a sense of Palestinian exilic identity that is anchored in the cultural memory of an ongoing catastrophe.

De-Palestinianized

In "Reflections on Al-Nakba", the stories, together with the oral and written circumstances of their transmission, trigger a memory that illustrates the exilic imaginary of the Palestinian people. The dominant characteristic of these stories is that their storytelling of *al-nakba* is both motivated by the need to make sense of a traumatic event from the past, and by the emphatic attempt to give shape to the Palestinian subject's memory of an uncertain condition of forced displacement in the present. This memorial mode of storytelling can be seen at work in the first narrative of the collection, that of Mamdouh Nofal (b. 1944).

In a continuously arresting narrative, Nofal tells how the event of *al-nakba* continues to exacerbate his cultural memory of loss of place. Consider the following fragment with which Nofal opens his story:

> The closest I can come to explaining what 1948 means to me, and how it affected the path I took in life and the choices I made, is to tell about growing up in Qalqilya, on the frontline with Israel. When the dust of 1948 settled, Qalqilya itself had not been occupied, falling in what came to be called the West Bank. But it had lost more than 90 percent of its agricultural lands, its main source of livelihood, which were now farmed by the Jewish colonies across the railroad tracks that had once linked Turkey, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt and which now formed the border with the newly created State of Israel. The war had also transformed Qalqilya into a main station for refugees fleeing the massacres and the fighting in Kfar Saba, Abu Kishk, Miska, Byar Adas, Shaykh Muwwanis, and al-Tireh, who increased the town's population by half. It is difficult, after the passage of fifty years, to sort out my own memories from those of my family, neighbors, friends, and schoolmates, from the collective memory of my hometown. But it *seems to me* that of the battles for the defense of the town, I have *vague* memories of the young men organizing night and day guard shifts and of the Iraqi army camp and the Palestinian military formations near town. I also remember the throngs of refugees in the mosque next door to our house. The girls' school and the boys' school were also turned into refugee centers, and there was chaos everywhere as the town didn't have the means to absorb such a huge influx. Some of the refugees settled in our town and live there to this day, while others moved inward to other towns or onwards to exile, due to the difficulty of making a living and the scarcity of water resources. (5-6)

Nofal's narrative reflects a key trope of the catastrophe as an event that imprints a life. *Al-nakba* is an experience that is not only engraved in his memory but also inscribes his personal choices in life. This experiential trope is given concrete shape in Nofal's use of the phrases "the path I took" and "the choices I made", which signify his experience of the loss of Palestine as a climactic instance that determined the course of his later life. Yet, he phrases this determining impact in relation to choice. At stake here, thus, is Nofal's need to assert the *possibility* of choice under constraining circumstances so as to emphasize the need for freedom.

Moreover, what characterizes Nofal's storytelling is that he does not name *al-nakba*; instead, he describes it as a date, "1948". In his narrative, however, this date takes the place of a noun rather than a qualification of an event, a noun that implies a story. This story narrates the subject's loss of home and exile. For Nofal, the only way to tell this story is through recalling his memories "about growing up in Qalqilya". To tell these memories, then, is to give voice to a collective loss of place. For Nofal, to tell about this collective loss is the closest he can come to expressing what *al-nakba* means to him. This can be seen in the difficulty which Nofal faces in sorting out his "own memories from those of [his] family, neighbors, friends, and schoolmates, from the collective memory of [his] hometown". Thus, Nofal can approach the event through memory, but not quite reach it.

Narratologically, one of the central drives in the opening of Nofal's story is the nearly explicit desire of his narrative voice to present *al-nakba* as a malleable event that resonates through its temporal connections to an actual condition of loss of home and displacement. Significantly, Nofal's voice is temporally and spatially removed from an autobiographical narrative structure of causality, and condemned to the remembering of the "after of the event": the ways in which the action of *al-nakba* determines his life as much as the agency of the Palestinian subject. This memorial storytelling of the after of the event manifests itself textually through Nofal's use of the metaphor of settling dust, "when the dust of 1948 settled". This metaphor can be read both thematically and temporally.

Thematically, the dust signifies the violent nature of the catastrophic event and corresponds, therefore, to the chaotic aftermath caused by the huge influx of refugees, "there was chaos everywhere […]". Temporally, the settling of the dust can be read as Nofal's attempt to brush off the dust of time so that the temporal gap between the past and the present can be bridged. Once again, the difficulty that Nofal faces in sorting out his memories from the past in the present supports these interpretations. This difficulty of remembering is further highlighted through Nofal's use of words and phrases such as "vague" and "it seems to me".

These indications of indecision hint that memory in the narrative thus entangles the personal and the communal. Through this entanglement, the mode of Nofal's storytelling becomes emphatically memorial rather than autobiographical. His narrative shifts from his interior life (individual memory, the motor of autobiography) to the anterior life of the people of Qalqilya, "the collective memory of [his] hometown".

In the context of diasporic and transnational identities, this memorial mode of storytelling of the after of the event invokes a specific grounding of Palestinian cultural identity in exile as a construction composed of individual and collective experiences in time and space. As Stuart Hall argues, cultural identity is not something that ever really exists in a completed state, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Rather, it is constantly in a process of transformation. Cultural identity is not something fixed in the past, awaiting discovery; nor is it an accomplished essence. On the contrary, identity is subject to the movements of history, culture, and power. However, for Hall, cultural identities also have their histories, and these histories have real effects, both symbolic and material. In addition, cultural identities are always constructed through memory, narrative, fantasy and myth. Cultural identity is thus not an essence, but a positioning (1997: 51-52). This notion of cultural identity as a constructed positioning changes the way we conceptualize political identity, since we can no longer imagine it as residing solely in specific institutions.

Seen from this perspective, the cultural identity of the subject (as much as his or her life) depends not only on his or her ability to remember the past, but, more importantly, on the subject's present, including political ability to articulate his or her identity in terms of this past. Cultural identity entails a configuration of the ways in which the subject is both, to borrow Hall's terminology, "positioned by, and positions [him- or herself] within the narrative of the past" (1997: 52). This concept of cultural identity helps illuminate what Nofal's story performs. Nofal's memorial storytelling articulates Palestinian exilic identity experientially, as composed of a variety of losses, each of which includes information about what Palestinian subjects *were* and, more importantly, about what they *were becoming*. This specific positioning of identity is relevant both on the levels of the Palestinian subject's identification with the lost homeland and his or her loss of (political) identity in the everyday of exile.

In Nofal's narrative, the loss of his hometown is not only a geographical loss of place, but the loss of a land that sustains life, a loss of the means of life. Such a loss leads to the transformation of the place, but equally to the transformation of how the political identity of this subject is subsequently positioned (by himself as well as by others) in the present. Falling within the border zone "in what came to be called the West Bank", Nofal's town (Qalqilya)

not only loses its trees and fields, "its source of livelihood", and is transformed into "a main station of refugees", but also the identity of the people who inhabit this place is transformed. Instead of Palestinian citizens, the people of Qalqilya are now "Palestinian refugees":

> So our town which had been self-sufficient and relatively comfortable becomes destitute virtually overnight, cut off from its livelihood of orchards and farmlands on the coastal plain and cattle breeding and trade with al-Tireh, al-Taybeh, Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Lydda, and Ramla. The conditions of the original townspeople abruptly deteriorated to abject poverty, such that there wasn't much difference between them and the refugees. (6)

Thus, the catastrophe affects all the people of the town. During *al-nakba*, not only the town "becomes destitute" but also the living conditions of the "original townspeople" (or *Muwateneen*) of Qalqilya "abruptly deteriorate to abject poverty". Through these desperate conditions, the people of the town are transformed from being "hosts" of other displaced refugees into refugees themselves (or *LaaJ'een*): "there wasn't much difference between them and the refugees".[95]

The transformation into refugees constitutes a shift from being sufficient subjects into subjects deprived of their means of livelihood, and, hence, denied their right to acquire a sovereign political identity. This can be seen in Nofal's description of how the "abject poverty" that the people of Qalqilya had to endure turned them into a people who are objects of charity:

> Hunger spread, and if it hadn't been for the huge quantities of dates provided by the Iraqi government, many would have died. I remember that we children used to gather the date pits and sell them to bakeries – a full basket for one piaster. We were also set to gathering firewood and dry vegetable stems for cooking fuel and grasses and wild herbs for the rabbits and sheep. The dire situation of Qalqilya's inhabitants was taken into consideration after the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was set up in 1950 and welfare cards were distributed along with emergency and fixed rations to everyone […] I will always remember the number of my family's welfare card: 58610405. (6)

[95] The term *Muwateneen* is used in Palestinian discourse to distinguish between those Palestinians who originally lived in cities, towns and villages in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip before *al-nakba* (1948) from those Palestinians, the refugees, *LaaJ'een*, who were forced to leave their homes in other places in Palestine and had to settle down in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. For studies concerned with the specificities and the ambivalences of these two terms as well as with the socio-political situation of Palestinian refugees in general, see Shiblak (1996: 36-45), Tansley (1997), and Mattar (2000).

Thus, having lost their homes, trees and fields, Palestinians now became dependent on charity and international relief aid. Such living conditions often trigger the subject's feelings of a denied subjectivity, and further add to a loss of self-confidence. What underlies this loss, as I already pointed out in my second chapter, is a spatio-temporal actual condition of denial of access to home within which the Palestinian subject is constantly deprived of his or her cultural space of selfhood.

The link between charity and loss of identity can be seen in Nofal's persistent remembering of the number of his family's welfare card: "I will always remember […]". The welfare card that Nofal refers to is still in currency as we speak today. For Palestinians, it represents a material symbol that constantly reminds them both of their catastrophic loss of homeland and of their refugeeism and helplessness as subjects in exile. In this sense, the catastrophe becomes a number (1948), and the subject's identity becomes a number "58610405"; hence, survival in the aftermath of *al-nakba* depends on numbers. The card's number contains some of the digits of the date of *al-nakba* "1948" that is engraved in Nofal's mind; as I read it, the card itself becomes an embodiment of the *mankoub* (catastrophed) subject. The catastrophe of this subject is grounded not in a loss of cultural identity as a "Palestinian", but rather in a loss of his or her political identity as a "Palestinian citizen".

Similar conceptions of the Palestinians' transformation into refugees and the subsequent loss of their political identity are worked into many of the other stories in the collection. A poignant elaboration of this transformation and loss can be found, for example, in the narrative of Haider Abdel Shafi (1919-2008):

> One often reflects on the past, especially the eventful past. It is difficult to forget the years of the catastrophe, 1947-50, when Palestinians lost three quarters of their homeland and when half of their society was expelled by force and terror to become homeless refugees […] The influx of refugees posed difficult and complicated logistical problems in terms of shelter, food, health needs, schooling, and so on. The suddenness of the influx made the problems overwhelming. Apart from some outside help provided by a Quaker-led team of international volunteers, it was the determination of the residents that closed the gap […] The other part of the story is the attitude of the refugees themselves. In spite of their plight, they acted almost as though nothing had happened. The smile never left their faces, and they did not crumble in the face of their fate. This ability to absorb punishment and deprivation has become a trait of the Palestinians. There is no need to dwell on the many kinds of punishment sustained during occupation, but I remember an encounter that impressed me particularly. I was visiting a family whose home had just been demolished by the Israelis. Members of the family, standing amid the wreckage of their house, received me with smiles and got to scrambling about trying to find me something to sit on. It is difficult or impossible to subdue or annihilate such people, as Israel knows very well by now. (14-15)

Abdel Shafi remembers *al-nakba* as a climactic event through which Palestinians were forcefully expelled from their homes and ended up as "homeless refugees" in exile. Like Nofal, Abdel Shafi also remembers *al-nakba* in terms of dates. Significantly, however, for Abdel Shafi the memory of *al-nakba* is not neatly limited to the year of 1948. Instead, he remembers it as "the years of the catastrophe, 1947-50". This mode of remembering of the catastrophe as "years" both problematizes the singularity of the event, and delineates temporal variations of its subjective experience: *al-nakba* is experienced differently in time and space. In my analysis of Bakr's film *1948* in the previous chapter, I made a similar argument. There, I argued that the remembering of *al-nakba* as a date (and the different temporal variations of its event) is a crucial point particularly in relation to the notion of the commemoration of this event. As I pointed out, Palestinians commemorate *al-nakba*, similarly to the ways they experienced its event, at different temporal moments.

Moreover, Abdel Shafi not only recalls the desperate situation of refugees, but also reflects on their "attitude" in dealing with their catastrophe. This attitude constitutes the refugees' "ability to endure punishment and deprivation". In this sentence, the word "punishment" is key. As it is well known, there is no "punishment" without a "crime". Narratologically, this word signifies a conflation of focalization. While the Palestinian "I" suffers, the outside focalization (of Israeli military occupation in this case) attributes "guilt", hence punishment. At stake here, then, is a double focalization: an interiorized sense of hostility wherein the narrator becomes his own enemy and, thus, *de-Palestinianized*. Read through this double focalization, Abdel Shafi's description suggests that under Israeli military occupation it is Palestinian existence itself that is considered to be "the crime".[96]

Furthermore, the refugees' resilient attitude can be seen in Abdel Shafi's description of how they, in spite of their catastrophic loss of home, kept smiling and acted as if nothing happened: "The smile never left their faces, and they did not crumble in the face of their fate". The personification of the masses expressed in this description, through the words "smile" and "faces", not only gives the refugees a human face, but also situates their humanity in stark contrast to the inhumanity (of punishment) which these people experience.

What is significant about the narrative personification of the refugees is that it becomes a narrative mode neither of boasting nor of lamenting. Instead, this personification serves to

[96] For a very useful discussion on how Palestinian identity remains the only criminalized identity and delinquent selfhood – whose code word is terrorism – in a historical period in the West that has liberated or variously dignified most other races and nationalities, see Said (1994b: 256-88, and 1995b: 230-43).

expose a cultural practice that characterizes Palestinian identity. This practice can be seen in Abdel Shafi's encounter with the refugees. In this encounter, we see the people "standing amid the wreckage of their house" who receive their guest (Abdel Shafi) "with smiles and got to scrambling about trying to find me something to sit on". Through this encounter we see the people's resilient attitude and endurance in the face of catastrophe: in spite of the demolishion of their house, they still smile. But we also see them practicing their tradition, namely, their act of hospitality to comfort their guest. The positive note expressed in the final sentence at the end of this encounter, "it is difficult or impossible to subdue or annihilate such people, as Israel knows very well by now", becomes a political rallying cry.

With regard to Palestinians' political transformation into refugees, Abdel Shafi's mode of remembering *al-nakba* is relevant in two ways. The first, and most obvious, aspect is that his memory evokes the loss of place mainly as a human loss – a loss experienced by human beings. Second, his memory signifies that in spite of their loss of political identity (as homeless refugees), Palestinians managed to preserve their cultural identity. This preservation can be seen in the way Abdel Shafi elaborates on the resilient attitude of the refugees not only in terms of enduring the hardship under military occupation but also in their "ability to adjust":

> But what was probably most noticeable was the refugees' ability to adjust. Most of them were of rural society. They had gotten no education or at most an elementary education under the British; what had mattered to them was working on the land and living from it. With the sudden loss of their land, they immediately fixed on an alternative: education and knowledge […] Soon there were scores of Palestinian university graduates in sciences and humanities who found work opportunities in neighboring Arab states, making a decent living and enough to support their families in their places of refuge. In so doing they thwarted the attempts by Israel and others to erase the Palestinian identity. Soon they started agitating for a role in defending their political rights, which resulted in the establishment of the PLO in May 1964. (15-16)

In the wake of the catastrophe, Palestinians resorted to education and knowledge as a means of surviving the loss of their lands.

For Palestinians, education not only plays an important role in the way they perceive themselves in exile, but also serves as a tactic of resistance against forced expulsion and uprooting. Palestinians used education not merely as an avenue to improve their living conditions, "making a decent living and enough to support their families", but also as a form of and preparation for resistance. "Education as a tactic of resistence" is the Palestinians' countering of "the attempts by Israel and others to erase" their cultural identity since 1948. For

Palestinians, what constitutes this notion of education is the knowledge and belief that Palestine was lost because Palestinians were ignorant and uneducated back then. Seen in this context, Abdel Shafi's remembering of "the establishment of the PLO in May 1964" can be read in the sense that as much as he remembers the years of the Palestinians' loss of their homes and political identity, he equally remembers the times when the Palestinians' contemporary struggle against these losses was launched. Remembering historical data, moreover, is evidence of education.

The Jewish Train Simply Did Not Skid

The most moving part in Nofal's story is where figurations of Palestinian exilic subjectivity abound. In the following fragment, Nofal articulates the Palestinians' loss of their lands and their transformation into refugees in concrete terms in relation to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948:

> A National Guard was set up in Qalqilya, and many of the young men joined, their main job being to keep watch on the Israeli border from the trenches dug on the outskirts of town. We children used to amuse ourselves running back and forth between their positions, and some of the guards would send us on errands to buy cigarettes or matches they had run out of. We also used to compete in seeing who was boldest in sneaking into the old orchards and placing rocks or pouring motor oil on the railway tracks, hoping the Jewish train would skid. But the train kept moving back and forth relentlessly, blowing its shrill whistle each time it neared our town. (6)

I consider the train as evoked in this story to symbolize the violent disruption of the townspeople's rural ways of life. As a metaphor the "Jewish train" works on different levels. The townspeople's helplessness and ignorance to withstand the establishment of Israel produces humor, but is also a metonym for Palestinian exilic storytelling. This "Jewish train" simply did not skid, and became a terrifyingly visible juncture for the flourishing of the "new state" of Israel built not only on the denial but also on the destruction of the "old state" of Palestine and the subjects who carry its trace into the present.

This evocation of the "Jewish train" reflects the temporal progression of Nofal's story as a whole. To be sure, the temporal moment of narration in the opening fragments of his story takes place "inside" the event of *al-nakba*. However, immediately after the evocation of the train, this moment of narration shifts to after of the event. As a result of this rupture of the aftermath of *al-nakba*, the spatio-temporal properties of Palestinian loss of homeland and their transformation into refugees that incite Nofal's story become more concrete. Such a concrete

impulse of loss emerges particularly when we read Nofal's evocation of the "Jewish train" as a conceptual metaphor for the violence that engulfs the establishment of Israel in 1948. Read in this context, both the train's "relentless" movement and the violently felt presence of its "shrill whistle", then, become symbolic projections that signify the construction of Israel as constitutive of the Palestinians' *nakba* of 1948. At the heart of this symbolism of the Jewish train is that the violent establishment of Israel, as an ideological Zionist construct, not only confirms the Palestinians' loss of homeland and political identity in the past, but also determines the temporal duration of their stories of these losses in the present.

In Nofal's narrative, the story of *al-nakba* has a long duration. The narrative fragment that immediately follows his evocation of the train underscores this:

> After the establishment of the State of Israel and the departure of the Arab armies, Qalqilya's inhabitants began to realize that this would be a long story. The educated youth set their minds on going abroad. Some entered the Gulf countries illegally and some even died of suffocation hidden inside oil tanks. Men sold the jewelry of their women and tried to reclaim the poor mountainous lands that remained on our side of the border, digging out rocks and filling holes with soil to plan vegetables […] Throughout the years, the people of Qalqilya and the refugees dreamed of returning to their fields and villages. During the earlier years, their sleep was disturbed by nightmares involving Jews hounding them and chasing them out, and they brooded about how the Arab countries had conspired against them and the whole world shared in the injustice meted out to them. As time went on, al-Nakba was transformed into a memory that the people of Qalqilya went on commemorating with school holidays and demonstrations in the streets and near the Israeli border […] some of the town's imams saw Qalqilya's tribulations as a sign of God's anger at Palestinians for having gone astray. Many people resorted increasingly to religion […] A handful reacted by turning their back on religion, saying God had abandoned them and had not stood up for the holy places in the blessed land of Palestine (though they refused to join the Communist Party because the Soviet Union had recognized the State of Israel). My father, who was practically illiterate, joined the ranks of the independent nonbelievers. My illiterate mother, on the other hand, became more devout and urged me and my older brother to pray, to fast, and to learn the Qur'an by heart. Following her instructions, I prayed five times a day and often repeated the ayat al-kursi, which she said would protect whoever memorized it from the devil and the attacks of the Israelis. (7)

The establishment of Israel, then, presented as a climactic moment that unleashes the catastrophe of 1948, functions as a continuous provocation that prevents the Palestinians from fully constituting themselves, as citizens of a Palestinian state, in the everyday. This becomes clear in the ways the loss of place has made a critical impact on the Palestinians' daily lives. Having realized that in the aftermath of the establishment of Israel the loss of their lands is going to be "a long story", the townspeople attempt to go on with their lives. While some of

them end up in the void of exile outside Palestine in order to secure their living, others remain in Palestine and try to live from the lands left unoccupied by Israel on their side on the border.

The rupture of the "after of *al-nakba*" in the first sentence is expressive both formally and thematically. In this sense, "after" becomes also a metaphor, of rupture. Formally, the word "after" emulates the change in narrative tenses, from past to present, by which the temporal shift into the aftermath of the event is facilitated. Thematically, this "after" of the event is underlined by the story's sequence of events: namely that the realization of the townspeople – that their story "would be a long story" – takes place after the establishment of Israel. This narrative shift into the aftermath of the event is indicative of focalization of Israel as a point of reference for the Palestinian subject's experience of loss of place during *al-nakba* of 1948.

More ordinary words accrue metaphorical meanings. Such a possibility is further alluded to in the people's religious interpretation of *al-nakba* as "a sign of God's anger at Palestinians […]". This interpretation not only reflects the Palestinians' loss of place as violence beyond comprehension, but also, I contend, it grounds this loss as a projection of a cultural practice. An example of such a projection can be seen in the ways the townspeople attend to their religion in the wake of *al-nakba*. While some of them "resorted" to religion, others turned "their backs" on it. From these remarks we can, then, derive the notion that the loss of place and political identity impacts the exiles' cultural practices, that is, their understanding of themselves as much as of their cultural values – in this case, religion. The word "sign" itself, in the sentence quoted, refers to this power to transform meaning that metaphor implies.

In Nofal's story, reading the ways in which the loss of place impacts upon the everyday life of the subject in exile sets the tone for a specific narrative discourse of Palestinian catastrophe. What characterizes this discourse is an imaging of loss not in terms of the past *nakba* itself, but in terms of the discursive effect of this event on the subject – the *mankoub* in the present. This imaging of the *mankoub* subject is most pronounced in the ending of Nofal's story:

> Those days, whoever did not own a firearm tried to get one, though weapons had to be carefully concealed as the Jordanian police frequently conducted searches and confiscated whatever they found. Many young men carried out a variety of dangerous actions inside Israel […] Many were imprisoned by Jordan […] Many of Qalqilya's sons were killed, including fathers and relatives of friends of mine, when they sneaked across to "steal" a cow or horse or some clothes or water pipes or whatever they could lay their hands on in the Jewish colonies or harvest whatever crops they could in what

> had been their orchards and fields. No one in our town could be convinced that the fruits of their lands, still within sight just across the tracks, did not belong to them anymore […] Despite all the measures taken by Israelis and the Jordanians, frequent skirmishes between the people of our town and the Israeli troops and the colonists continued until 10 October 1956. At 9 P.M. on that date, Israeli forces launched a large-scale offensive against Qalqilya. Ground forces, including tanks, attacked from three directions, and warplanes bombed the town […] I still have clear images of the martyrs pulled out of the debris […] and I will never forget the funeral procession, when all the men, women, and children of the town walked from the mosque to the local cemetery […] When Israel conquered the West Bank in 1967, Moshe Dayan remembered his threat to raze Qalqilya. His troops drove out all the inhabitants and brought in bulldozers to plough the town under and erase it from the map, just as they had done with the villages of Bayt Nuba, Yalu, and Imwas. Qalqilya inhabitants were left without shelter […] By that time I was gone. I had joined the Arab Nationalist Movement in 1961, and a few years later after that, when I was twenty, I joined its military wing, The Heroes of the Return. From that time on, I devoted myself to military work within the Palestinian Revolution in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Tunis. (7-9)

This ending triggers different readings, in line with metaphoric narrativization of *al-nakba* as ongoing process rather than singular event. I will reflect on two of them: namely, the relationship between the subject and his or her lost place, and the repetition of *al-nakba* in the present.

Nofal's imaging exposes the *mankoub* subject's relationship with the lost place as a connection between life and death, an alternation between being and not being. This place-bound imaging manifests itself in the description of the townspeople who died while crossing the railway tracks in order to reclaim their lost lands and homes: "Many of Qalqilya's sons were killed […] when they sneaked across to 'steal' […] what had been their orchards and fields". Nofal's emphasis on the word "steal" together with the phrase "what had been their orchards and fields" triggers a semantic contradiction, particularly if we read the first sentence in the sense that "the people steal from what belongs to them". Narratologically, the word "steal" triggers a play with focalization. The act of "stealing" from the land is focalized by the Israelis. However, the problematics of this focalization is resolved in the second sentence through the people's conviction that the lands still belonged to them: "no one […] could be convinced […]" This conviction not only transforms the townspeople's act of "stealing" into an act of reclaiming their lost lands, but it also qualifies their resistance against the "official" Israeli designation of these lands as not their own. Through this conviction, the notion of "Palestinian resistance in exile" thus appears as not merely a matter of fending off the injustices of loss of home and political identity imposed on them in the past, but most importantly as an attempt to *undo* such injustices in the present.

This narrative figuration announces a plot line: through this double focalization the reader is prepared for the ending. What characterizes the ending of Nofal's story is that his storytelling articulates the townspeople's acts of resistance against the catastrophic loss of place, and also exposes a repetition of this loss in the present. Just as he begins his narrative with a loss of place, Nofal also ends it with a loss of place. On the one hand, the repetition signifies the continuity of loss, and hence, qualifies his story's open ending. On the other hand, this repetition of loss of place signifies a repetition of the catastrophe in the "after" of its (original) event – *al-nakba* of 1948. This repetition of can be observed in Nofal's remembering of the date of 1967, "when Israel conquered the West Bank". His memory presents us (the readers) with an image of the catastrophe similar to the one with which he began his narrative, for the catastrophe we saw in 1948 happens again in 1967. Just as in Nofal's description of *al-nakba*, at the end of his narrative we see the Israeli Army driving the townspeople out of their homes: "troops drove out all the inhabitants and brought in bulldozers to plough the town under and erase it from the map […]" This description announces three steps of annihilation both on the semantic filed and the narrative sequence; namely "driving out the town's inhabitants", "ploughing the town under", and "erasing it from the map". These agricultural metaphors reinforce the evocation of the land so much as the graduation, in three acts, of ever-increasing violence done to this land.

Nofal's repetition of *al-nakba* as the ending of his story has consequences for the reader. This repetition not only helps us understand how the subject's narrative of *al-nakba* is constructed through the memory of loss of homeland and political identity, but, crucially, through how this memory is sustained in a loss of place that is emphatically contemporary. This contemporaneity of loss finds compensation not in the past of the event of *al-nakba*, but in the present of its action in the everyday life of its subject. This happens through an ironic counter strategy of personalization and repetition, leading the reader to believe that the catastrophe of Palestinians is in fact a story that has been going on for a long time and that is still searching for its ending as we speak. This is given concrete shape in Nofal's final description when he says: "By that time I was gone […]" He joins the resistance movement outside Palestine – he ends up in exile. *Al-nakba*, at this point, appears as the ending of a story, yet at the same time as the beginning of another story. With *al-nakba*, a Palestinian story of a long absence and denial of home in exile began, and has not ended yet.

Nofal's memorial mode of storytelling invites a decoding of each narrative fragment as a reflection not of the past, but of the actuality of the present. Each narrative fragment, then, appears not as a text, but as a trace. As a narrative imagining of a Palestinian repressed

memory, this trace suggests the invisibility of a livable present and maps the envisioning of a site, not of a lost home, but of both the Palestinian subject's desire and his or her denial of this home in exile. Thus, reading *al-nakba* in (oral) narratives, through memory, becomes a reading of a narrative discourse wherein the imagining (or the imaging) of the future entails a narrative reversal of the present of exile. In order to make this case about narrative reversal, I will turn now to the next narrative in the collection, that by Fawaz Turki (b. 1941).

Catastrophic Time: Palestinian Roots Do Not Die

If Nofal's narrative ends with the Palstinians' expulsion into exile, then the narrative of Fawaz Turki functions as sequel, to narrate the *mankoub* subject's anxieties in in this condition. The dominant narrative topos in his story is that the exiled Palestinian cannot escape his or her past and roots. Considering that Palestinian identity is the subject of my study, this story resonates particularly strongly for me. In its affirmative framework of Palestinian identity, Turki's story raises the following question: if one's roots are too much to handle in the present, is the Palestinian subject then able to escape these roots in exile? In order to answer this question, Turki begins his story by telling about his attempts to "run away" from the misery of living in the refugee camps and to find, what he calls, "an alternative order of at-homeness" in Australia.

This is how he narrates his attempt to escape his Palestinian roots:

> By the middle of 1968, I had been around for twenty-seven years. And if you want a proof that youth is wasted on the young, what I had done with my life up till then is proof enough. For here I was, a Palestinian boy from the refugee camps, buzzing around the Australian bush, shearing sheep, working with road gangs, and toiling in the iron ore mines in the northwest. Palestine was several time zones away, and its memory was already beginning to fade in my mind. Truth to be told, there was more to it than that. When I'd arrived in Australia at age nineteen, I was some sort of a runaway, seeking an alternative order of at-homeness. I wanted to escape my roots. I didn't need my damn roots nagging away at me the whole time or have them daily shoved in my face, as they had been when I was growing up in Beirut**.** I didn't need others to remind me of my otherness whichever way I turned. In short, I was too young to be a Palestinian. I belonged to a people who had been brought to ruin by a fiercely parochial settler movement [Zionism] feeding on the drug of racial hatred and aggression that it had brought with them from Europe, a movement that in a relatively short time had put us in desperate flight across our borders, reduced us to being squatters in other people's lands, and tried to hound us out of history. (9-10)

Turki's opening words carry the reader from the abstraction of a metaphorical description of loss of homeland into the actuality of its imaginings in exile. For example, beneath the wide

expansive picture of his everyday in Australia, Turki takes us (both as readers of his text and listeners to his story) into the small details of his personal memory of the past but only to bring us back to the actuality of his present exile from Palestine. Speaking in a direct discourse to an assumed listener, and almost on a challenging tone, Turki presents his personal experience as a Palestinian exile as a manifestation of how the time of youth is wasted. In so doing, Turki focalizes the Palestinian subject's existence in exile first and foremost as a problematic experience, not merely of place, but of and in time. For Turki, being a Palestinian exile is an everyday condition that serves as "proof enough" for wasting the subject's time. Narratively, this "proof" is manifest in the difference in years between Turki's escape from his life in the refugee camps in Lebanon at nineteen and his realization of his Palestinian roots at twenty seven while in Australia.

This time-bound evocation of the subject's life in exile is also confirmed by the content narrated: Turki's reasons for escaping his roots. Turki explicitly presents himself as a "runaway" who is *willingly* seeking a different home – "I was some sort of a runaway […] I wanted to escape my roots […]" The final part of his description, however, transforms his seemingly willful desertion of his roots into a "desperate flight", part of the collective uprooting of the Palestinian people as a whole: "desperate flight across our borders […], reduced us to being squatters in other people's lands [...]" The word "squatter" here is a direct reference to the presence of Palestinian resistance movement (the PLO as a political force) in refugee camps in Lebanon during the civil war (1976-1982).[97] The contrast between the words "runaway" and "squatter" in Turki's description signifies that the Palestinians, having survived the destruction of *al-nakba* and ended up in exile, now became illegal occupants of other peoples' places.

The practice of "squatting", together with the act of "running away" in Turki's narrative, is connected to a reduced form of survival in Palestinian exile. This is most clear in his use of the verb "reduced". Turki's description of his experience in refugee camps in Lebanon fits in with Palestinians' collective perceptions of this experience as, what Rosemary Sayigh calls, an "abnormal state" of being that asserts varied adaptations but also a deep sense of homelessness (2005: 18). As I already argued in the second chapter, both the varied adaptations of the refugee camp experience and the sense of being "not at home" in exile have become distinct constructs of what constitutes contemporary Palestinian exilic identity.[98]

---

[97] On this episode of Palestinians' history in Lebanon, see Khalidi (1985).
[98] See Sayigh (2005: 17-39 and 2007: 86-105). Also, for studies concerned with the practice of "squatting", see Neuwirth (2004).

Moreover, Turki's narration exposes a layered structure of the subject's story of Palestinian exile. At the end of the passage quoted, Turki's storytelling deploys a narrative sequence that leads the reader to discover "the truth" of exilic existence. This narrative sequence moves away from condemnation (from *mankoub*) to conviction (re-Palestinianization): the final sentence has the form of an affirmative generalization, "I belonged to a people that […]". This narrative sequence influences the reader: it triggers a different reading effect which emerges from reading Turki's story before the phrase "Truth to be told" and after it – his description of Zionism. As a consequence, Turki's presentation of the story not only qualifies his choice "to escape", but also, more importantly, it reveals what determines this choice (or better lack of choice) in the present. This reading effect happens as follows.

At the moment when Turki utters the words "Truth to be told […] I wanted to escape my roots. I didn't need my damn roots nagging away at me the whole time […]", the reader, at first, reacts with shock and disbelief at the explicit ideology of the narrative discourse through which he presents his attempted escape from his roots. The personification of Palestinian roots as nagging parents is, indeed, expressive and communicative of a strong desire to escape, yet "too real" and generic at the same time.

This reaction, however, turns into understanding immediately after Turki's explanation of what the Zionist movement did to the Palestinians: "[Zionism] […] tried to hound us out of history". This sentence exposes the essence of *nakba* and the violation of Palestinian cultural identity in exile: Palestinians are not only subjected to a forced displacement from place, but also crucially condemned of a *re-placement* in history; hence in time. It is only at this point of the narrative that Turki's imagining of the Palestinian subject's existence as well as his or her life is stretched to its extreme, back into the actuality of exile. Through this narrative sequence, the reader's perception of what is being told (the subject's attempted escape from Palestinian roots) triggers his or her imagining of what, and the extent to which, Palestinian "uprooting" from home *does to* the subject's life (and his or her choices) in exile. The condition of being put "out of place" forces the Palestinian subject *out* of him- or herself in time. At stake here is the violent psychology of forced exile that characterizes the existence of Palestinian subject in the present. This violence manifests itself most clearly in Turki's statement, "I was too young to be a Palestinian". This statement not only signifies his late realization of loss of homeland, but also the long duration of the Palestinians' spatio-temporal expulsion and denial of access to their homes.

In Palestinian exile, this narrative imagining of the impact of uprooting on the subject's existence both evokes the reader's personal empathy, and gets him or her involved in the story. Taking into consideration the oral and written circumstances of Turki's narrative, this narrative effect aims at merging the personal (or private) and public realms. This merging is necessary for conceptualizing the relationship between the Palestinian subject and his or her existence in exile as a political cause for the liberation of his or her life: the Palestinian self as struggling for its selfhood.

Similar narrative articulations of the Palestinian subject's inability (if not the impossibility) to keep the personal and the public realms separate can be found in other narratives in the collection. For example, the following passage from the story of Shafiq Al-Hout (b. 1932) describes his involvement in the Palestinian cause against exile at the end of his narrative:

> So I have spent forty years of my life as a full-time militant in the Palestinian movement, and I hope to spend the rest of my life on the same road. From the time I left Jaffa, I have not been able to separate what is called private from what is called public life, to distinguish between myself and the cause. And if any Palestinian tries to do so he will find others who will remind him that he cannot, no matter how hard he tries. (27)

As Al-Hout's description emphatically shows, for the Palestinian subject, the merging of the personal and the public realms represents a lifetime experience of struggling *for life*. In this struggle, the subject cannot "distinguish between [him- or herself] and the cause". This impossibility to distinguish domains of life is given narrative shape. According to Al-Hout, not only will the Palestinian subject, "no matter how hard he tries", constantly fail to establish a complete divide between the personal and the public, but he or she "will find others who will remind him [or her] that he cannot". This is precisely what Turki's story and the other ones in "Reflections on Al-Nakba" are attempting to achieve: not so much to gain our sympathy for the Palestinians, but to remind us of their modes of existence in exile; an existence wherein the personal and the public merge.

Like Al-Hout, Turki also cannot separate the personal from the public. In Turki's story, this takes the form of his inability to escape his Palestinian roots (and past). Living in Australia, "several time zones away from Palestine", Turki has found the ideal natural setting to escape his past:

> I could not have chosen a better place to flee to. The forbidding landscape of the Australian outback has a way about it – about its searing heat, its unfamiliar rhythms,

> its influence on the human imagination, its rock and ash and echoes, and the expanse of stars in its night sky – that makes a man jump outside the skin of his past. (10)

Turki's description of Australia as "a place to flee to" focalizes that country as a place that has all the requirements of forgetting, an "amnesic place". However, this amnesic place, which "makes a man jump outside the skin of the past", neither makes Turki forget nor helps him to escape his past. This is, of course, why memory is so crucial to identity. He cannot escape his past simply because his memories of himself (and life) as a Palestinian "always come back":

> But that, I discovered after a while, I could not escape. For it would always come back, that past, as if it were an ache, an ache from a sickness a man didn't know he had. Like the smell of ripened figs at a Perth supermarket that would place me, for one blissful moment, under that big fig tree in the backyard of our house in Haifa. Like the taste of sea salt in my mouth as I swam in the Indian Ocean that would take me back to the Mediterranean, our own ancient sea. Like the apocalyptic images that my mind would dredge up, out of nowhere, of our refugee exodus twenty years before, as we trekked north on the coastal road to Lebanon, where pregnant women gave birth on the wayside, screaming to heaven with labor pain, and where children walked alone, with no hands to hold. Like the memories of my first year at Burj al-Barajneh – a makeshift refugee camp on the outskirts of Beirut – when I was always hungry. And cold. And angry. Angry that the tricycle that my dad had brought me a short time before our flight was left behind in Haifa and that some Jewish kid was now riding it around. These evocations loomed large in my consciousness, where they had taken irrevocable tenure. I could no more escape them than I could my skin. The sheer force of my Palestinian past had seeped into the quick of my very being and had a mastering grip on my identity. There was no escaping that – Australian bush or no Australian bush. As a Palestinian in exile, I carried some mighty heavy cargo on my back, and when I was, as it were, driven to unpack it […] I would feel that anger again, that same anger from twenty years before, welling up in me like vomit. (10)

Turki cannot escape his roots because the memories of his past life in Palestine continuously invade his existence as "acts of memory" in the present.[99] These acts of memory not only aggravate, almost assault his mind, but also his body, or more precisely, his senses – the crossroads between mind and body. This can be appreciated in the similes he uses to describe these memories such as "the smell of a ripened fig", "the taste of the sea", and "my mind would dredge up […]" These evocations not only ground his memory as mental in terms of imagination, but also as physical in terms of the senses of touch and taste. This mode of remembering intensifies the subject's feelings of his or her Palestinian identity. Thus, Turki's

[99] For the term "acts of memory", see Bardenstein (1999: 148-71 and 2002: 353-87), and Bal (1999b: vii-3).

identity as a Palestinian combines, through memory, the imaginative as much as the corporeal, coalescing in an identity that Turki "could no more escape than [he] could escape [his] skin".

Furthermore, Turki's storytelling of his memories signifies that his acts of memory always come back in exile as a burden: "an ache from a sickness a man didn't know he had". The word "an ache" here is relevant particularly to the understanding that, in Palestinian exile, the subject's memories function neither as a relief from nor as a supplement to what was lost. This is a radical departure from the constructive use of nostalgic remembering as I discussed it in the first chapter. This is so because Turki's memories unleash "apocalyptic images", images "of our refugee exodus […]" In exile, these images do not diminish the subject's loss of place, but rather amplify it. The moment Turki remembers, all he feels is "that anger again, that same anger from twenty years before, welling up in [him] like vomit". The metaphor of "vomit" is expressive of a very physical and uncontrollable sickness that recurs in waves. This metaphor makes Turki's anger specific: the enemy's hatred is a strange body inside him. Turki's imaging of how the memories of his Palestinian roots come back to him exposes his life in exile as an experience of what I call "catastrophic time". By "catastrophic time", I am referring to the Palestinian subject's experience of the temporality of *al-nakba* in his or her ongoing exile.

In order to assess this notion of "catastrophic time", I propose to understand it in terms of the distinction Mieke Bal makes between the phenomenon of the multiple temporality of events and the subject's experience of such a multi-temporality – what Bal calls "heterochrony". In a recent essay entitled "Double Movement", Bal distinguishes between phenomena and the subjective experience of multi-temporality in the event of migration. According to Bal, migration is:

> the experience of time as multiple, heterogeneous. This experience includes multiple times between the time of haste and waiting, the time of movement and stagnation, the time of memory and of an unsettling present. The phenomenon I call multi-temporality; the experience of it, heterochrony. (2008: 1)

Bal's distinction between the phenomenon of multi-temporality and the subjective experience of it in and through time forgrounds travel, movement, and the subject's everyday life as migratory conditions of the post-colonial world. This distinction between the phenomenon and its subjective experience not only helps me to read the multiple temporality of the event of *al-nakba*, but also the subject's heterochronic experience in the present of exile.

In Turki's story, the multi-temporality of his experience of *al-nakba* is manifest in the way he describes his life in exile. Having failed to escape his Palestinian past (and roots), Turki's life in exile is nothing but a time of waiting:

> And here I was in Australia, a Palestinian kid with a name too difficult to pronounce and a patrimony too difficult to locate, talking to myself and waiting for Godot. No matter. For unlike Beckett's two vagrants, I was destined, as were other Palestinians of my generation, to meet that mythical character. Our massive silence, it turned out, our I-me dialogue, our self-address over the previous two decades, was itself a kind of rhetoric […] Nineteen Sixty-Eight. There was something magical about it all […] It happened all over the planet, all at once, all the same year: from the general rebellion in France, known as "les événements," that brought down the de Gaulle government, to the antiwar movement in the United States that brought down the Johnson administration; from the Tet offensive in Vietnam to the Cultural Revolution in China; from the Tupamararos in Uruguay to the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland (when Catholics and Protestants marched together for the first time); from the student takeover of Columbia University to the Hippie dropout in Haight Ashbury; from the student protest against Communist rule in Poland to those similar protests against the Russian invasion in Czechoslovakia; from the Beatles releasing their "Helter Skelter" album to feminists disrupting the Miss America Pageant; from the bloody confrontation in Chicago outside the Democratic Convention head-quarters to the 'three M formulations' (Marcuse, Marx and Mao) of the new left […] it was no wonder that Jimmy Morrison was singing then, "We want the world, and we want it all now". And we were there too, part of it all. We the Palestinians were there doing our own thing – in Karameh, in March of that year. (11)

Here, the multi-temporality of Turki's experience of *al-nakba* is most visible in the simultaneity of the date and the waiting: the time of event (1948) and the time of stagnation (1968). The moment of narration takes place in 1968 and not in 1948. As I argued earlier in the case of Nofal's narrative, the storytelling of *al-nakba* in the "after" of its event problematizes its singularity and, thus, delineates temporal variations of its subjective experience in the present. A similar argument can be made here in relation to Turki's use of the year 1968 as a starting point for his narration of *al-nakba*. Turki's storytelling of 1948 through 1968, I argue, not only marks the catastrophe's multi-temporality, but equally exposes his subjective experience of this multi-temporality.

This multi-temporality can be seen at work in Turki's imagining of his experience of time in exile as a condition of waiting. Through his metaphorical evocation of Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* (1952), this condition manifests itself as a time that comprises endless and absurd waiting. Turki's description that he "was destined […] to meet that mythical character […]" is poignant here. The combination of the phrases "to meet the mythical character", "massive silence" and "our I-me dialogue" means that Turki and his generation of Palestinians

waited too long in exile, but also that their cries for help were not heard by the world. Time in exile appears, then, as a predicament. For Turki, the only way to endure this predicament is by updating its time. Turki's naming of the various revolutionary events that took place in 1968 – "It happened all over the planet, all at once, all the same year: from the general rebellion in France […]" – positions the Palestinians and their struggle for freedom in a world context of resistance and emancipation. It also signifies a movement of and in time. All the events that Turki recalls evoke struggles for change and are, hence, temporally forward looking.

However, unlike for Beckett's characters and other people in the world, in Turki's case movement in time and looking ahead to the future is utterly grounded in the act of looking back. This is how Turki continues his description:

> Except for one thing. Everybody else was saying: There is no looking back. Are you kidding? Our movement was all about looking back. We could not move forward in 1968 without looking back to 1948 – looking back anew at what had happened to us during the two decades on either side of that year. (11)

Thus, for the Palestinians, there is no movement forward "without looking back to 1948". And "looking back" always entails the question:

> So the bastards think they have gotten away with it? Hell, no. These people have walked off with our home and homeland, with our moveable and immovable property, with our land, our farms, our shops, our public buildings, our paved roads, our cars, our theatres, our clubs, our parks, our furniture, our tricycles. They hounded us […] and shoved us in refugee camps. They so thoroughly destroyed our villages that nothing was left of them but the wind that now blew through them. And they even robbed us of our name. Yes, our name got lost in the shuffle in 1948. Those of us in exile became known as "the Arab refugees". Those in the West Bank became "Jordanians". Those few who stayed behind became "Israeli Arabs". And those in Gaza, well, heck, no one even knew what to call them. We were the people that history was supposed to have forgotten and that God was supposed to have given His back to. Excuuuuuse me! I guess both needed a bit of a nudge. And we gave them that in 1968. This was a short time after the "Israelis", as they came to call themselves, were able to conquer and occupy the 23 percent remnant of our country. (11)

Turki's description of the Palestinians' persistent "looking back" is related to the subject's experience of the multi-temporality of *al-nakba* in the present as an experience of "catastrophic time". This is so because the act of "looking back to 1948" constantly reveals a violent destruction of the past, "[t]hese people have walked off with our home […]" The stark image of people carrying off homes on their backs is one example of the need for concrete depiction. By "concrete depiction", I mean here that the analysis of narrative imaginings of

Palestinian catastrophe and exile needs to be first and foremost the analysis of the individual subject but precisely to expose his or her past and present positions within the collective narrative of loss of homeland. To interpret *al-nakba*, through this image of the Israelis "walking off" with the homes of Palestinians, then, is to expose not only the ways in which Palestinians were forcefully displaced from place, but more importantly how they are being replaced in time. Twenty years after *al-nakba*, at the moment of narration in Turki's story, and sixty years, at the moment of reading (and listening to) his narrative, the violent destruction of the Palestinian past settles, through memory, the present of the catastrophed subject. It also articulates his or her exile as a time not of movement but of stagnation, almost "standstill".

This narrative articulation is not merely grounded in the material destruction of the homeland: "They so thoroughly destroyed our villages that nothing was left of them but the wind that now blew through them". As a consequence, symbolically it is constituted by the facts that, together with the material destruction of Palestine, the Palestinians were "robbed" of their names so that they ended as nameless refugees in exile. This material-symbolic depletion is at work in Turki's description of how both the theft of identity and the subsequent dispersion complicate the Palestinian subject's existence in exile as a condition of "stagnant waiting". For this subject, to move forward in time in exile entails first and foremost a restoration of his or her "stolen" identity. Hence, the resistance to the theft of identity constantly conditions the Palestinian subject's envisioning of the future in the present of exile. This subject's movement in time in the ongoing exile is always a movement towards changing "the past of and in this present".

Turki's emphatic exclamation, "Excuuuuuse me!", can be read in two ways. First, the "Americanism" of his exclamation, through its sonoric effect of the prolongated "u", signifies that Turki's narrative at this point is specifically directed to an American audience. Second, and more importantly, Turki's exclamation articulates the Palestinian subject's refusal of the destruction of the past, but at the same time expresses his or her resistance to such destruction in the present. This resistance is reflected in the centrality of the year 1968 in his story, which indicates, for Turki, the time of resistance – the year of the battles of "Karameh [dignity] in March of that year" – in which the Palestinians gave themselves as well as the Israelis "a bit of a nudge". On the one hand, this nudge for the Palestinians served to raise their awareness of the need for resistance in exile. On the other hand, for the Israelis, this nudge was the point when the Palestinians launched their struggle to reclaim their stolen name. As Turki puts it:

> If the Israelis feared us at that time, what they feared was not our military might – we had none – but the resurrection of our name. For once we wrested control of our name and etched it on the conscience of the world, we raised a question that became a deadly threat to Israel's very legitimacy: If these people are Palestinians, the world wondered, then they came from Palestine, and if they came from Palestine, then why they are not allowed to return there? (12)

Thus, for Turki, what the Palestinian resistance in exile achieved is that it gave the Palestinians their name back on the world stage.

Immediately after this reflection, Turki's description shifts to what the catastrophic loss of home concretely means for him:

> Now they were astride the whole of historic Palestine and then some, jubilant at their new role as latter day colonial overloads […] They robbed us (I keep using this word because no other will do) of our homeland, superimposed their own state on it, and then proceeded to define what they had created in isolation of its impact on our lives and national destiny. Now they have the chutzpah (a word they coined) to celebrate their crime this year, with much fanfare, exactly half a century after the fact. Look, I am angry. Still angry after all these years. Here's one reason. A while back, on the eve of the Gulf war, I returned to the old country for a visit – yes, these people would allow a Palestinian Arab (with a Western passport) "to visit", but welcome a Russian Jew "to live" in Palestine. I went to the house where I was born. The house with the big backyard and the big fig tree. The house where I had left my tricycle behind in 1948. The house where I had my original leap to consciousness. The house where God had willed me to be born, like all His creatures, to an inviolate freedom. The house I was to grow up and acquire a past in. I knocked on the door and some low-life immigrant, with an Eastern European accent, opened it, and when he realized who I was, refused me the right even to look around. (12-13)

Turki's choice of words such as "robbing" and "superimposing" is quite revealing. Turki stresses the theft of Palestinian identity as a colonial endeavor. This is clear when he says: "Now […] jubilant at their new role as latter day colonial overloads […]" His insistence on the theft of Palestinian identity through the repetitive occurrence of the phrase "robbed us" allows this "theft" to gather temporal significance as a "crime" in the present; "half a century after the fact".

This temporality of loss of place and political identity exposes once more his personal experience of *al-nakba'*s multi-temporality in the present. This can be seen in the second part of the passage in the account that Turki gives as a reason for his anger. In this encounter, we not only see Turki effectively banned from having a past in his home, "[t]he house I was to grow up and acquire a past in"; we see him denied even the right to take a look at it: "refused

me the right to look around". It is precisely this denial of home as a site of "having a past" in the present that causes Turki's anger.

At the end of his story, Turki describes how the Palestinians, despite both their loss of home in the past and their exclusion from it in the present, have managed to preserve their cultural identity. Significantly, he introduces this resilience with the temporal injunction to wait:

> But wait! Our remembrance of where we came from has not torn at the edges. We have not, even after these fifty years, been hounded into oblivion. Palestinian exiles, wherever they are, share the same historical preoccupation, that same turn of phrase, that same communicative internality, that same love for the hammer beat of *al-awda* [the return] song that we all grew up singing ("who am I?/ who are ye?/ I am the returnee/ I am the returnee") and that we today hum to our children as we tuck them in every night. We'll still be around fifty years from now, and if Israel is still around – a doubtful proposition, if you ask me – we'll be knocking on its doors, asking to be let in. And if there is no response, we'll break the door down. We'll break the door down, baby. If God is my witness, we'll break it down. My children are not growing up in refugee camps as I have done. They are not living in a host state whose authorities snarl at their heels, or place them close to the door for easy eviction, as their father had lived in Arab host states. But they do realize that, though they are loyal Americans, only in their ancestral homeland would their larger identity be housed, and only through the struggle to liberate it do they become enduringly defined. (13-14)

This description reveals two specific aspects of this resilience's construction in the present. First, Palestinian identity appears to be as built around a shared experience of the subject's present sense of history in exile. This shared experience manifests itself when Turki says: "Palestinian exiles, wherever they are, share the same historical preoccupation […]" For Turki, what characterizes Palestinian exilic identity is the collective belief in the notion of *al-awda*. This notion refers to the Palestinians' right of return to the homes from which they were expelled in 1948.

Turki describes the dynamics through which Palestinians share this notion of *al-awda* through its song. Palestinians not only have the "same love" that the song of *al-awda* embodies, "that we all grew up singing", but more significantly they also "hum" this song to their children. This act of "humming" brings with it the second aspect of the construction of Palestinian identity in exile – memory transmission. The act of humming to the children signifies a cultural mode of transmission of Palestinian memory of the loss of home, signified both in the loss of words – humming consists of inarticulate sounds – and, at the same time, in the repetition of an old song whose implied lyrics are only too well known. As a result of this memory transmission, Palestinian cultural identity in exile appears as trans-generational.

In Turki's narrative, memory as an aspect of Palestinian identity undergoes a shift in function. Unlike in the beginning of his story, where memory functions to recall the burden of loss of home, at the close of Turki's story memory turns into a sign of resistance and hope to overcome the predicament of this loss in exile. It is now future-oriented. This can be observed immediately after his description of the act of humming:

> We'll still be around fifty years from now […] My children are not growing up in refugee camps […] only in their ancestral homeland would their larger identity be housed, and only through the struggle to liberate it do they become enduringly defined.

What holds Turki's images together is the phrase "my children", which signifies continuity of struggle and resistance against the loss of home in exile. If Turki and his generation cannot overcome the loss of home, then this loss can be overcome in the generation of his children, the later generations of post-*nakba* Palestinians. Turki expresses the conviction that struggle and resistance are the only means through which his children's identity can be "enduringly defined" as Palestinians, finally at home.

But there is more to Turki's use of memory. What characterizes his imagination is that he describes his children's identity as Palestinians even though they were neither born in Palestine nor grew up in refugee camps. It is precisely here that memory takes on, yet again, a different function in Turki's narrative. This time memory appears as a tool of self-preservation of the identity of post-*nakba* Palestinians in exile. Thus, the cultural transmission of memory in Turki's story, from parent to child through the act of humming the song, not only feeds the subject's notions of struggle and resistance against the loss of home, but it also effects his or her identity as Palestinian in exile.

Similar conceptions of the role of memory as a tool for the preservation of the identity of second and third-generation of post-*nakba* Palestinians can be found in the other narratives of the collection. A poignant example is told by Inea Bushnaq (b. 1938). Consider the following passage in which she describes how her American-born daughter performs her Palestinian identity in spite of being away from Palestine most of her life:

> And if the loss of Palestine were my chief bequest, I have watched my American-born daughter follow in some of my long ago footsteps. She has trotted to the *furun*, the communal bake house, with a tray-load of risen dough balanced on her head. She has developed a taste for green almonds with salt and fresh chickpeas roasted on the vine. And, finally, she said to me on the Hudson Street, New York, "Stop! Doesn't that smell make you think for a second that you are in Ramallah?" (18-19)

Thus, by following in the footsteps of her mother, the daughter asserts her identity as a Palestinian. The act of "following in the footsteps" signifies the memory transmission in Palestinian exile from one generation to another. This act, and more precisely where it takes place in the case of "mother-daughter" relationship, has another cultural connotation: Palestinian tradition. *El Bint Tala'a La Emha* ("Like mother, like daughter") is a common saying in Palestinian culture signifying not merely the natural, but also the nurturing aspect of identity interconnection and positioning, and thus, memory transmission in the process of growth and the act of "teaching how to" that it entails. Not only do we see the daughter performing Palestinian identity by mastering traditional acts, "She has trotted to the *furun* […]", but we also see her enacting this identity through the senses: "She has developed a taste […]" and she recognizes a smell. This reenactment and mastering of performance of identity is never quite attainable without a memory.

These narrative evocations of the role of the familial (or trans-generational) transmission of memory in the preservation of Palestinian identity in exile relate to the problematic notion of "post-memory" of *al-nakba*. As I already pointed out in my introduction to this study, I do not use the term "post-memory" to suggest that *al-nakba* is in the past, but on the contrary to suggest that the originating moment of the ongoing catastrophe has been transmitted to subsequent generations of Palestinians. I shall return shortly and discuss further how "post-memory" can be interpreted in the context of Palestinian catastrophe in the next section of this chapter. It suffices to say at this point that the significance of these narrative evocations of trans-generational transmission of memory of loss of place is grounded in the questions they engender concerning the ways in which we conceive of Palestinian cultural identity, especially of later generations of Palestinians who have not experienced *al-nakba* of 1948. Some of these questions include, for example, whether the identity of these subjects is completely constituted by their parents' memories of the past event? And, is the post-memorial discourse of *al-nakba* – through the familial transmission of the memory of the past event (1948) – the only discourse that shapes the identity of post-*nakba* Palestinians today?

These questions bring me to the final set of oral narratives of *al-nakba* that I wish to analyze in this chapter: the narratives of Yazid Sayigh (b. 1955) from "Reflections on Al-Nakba", and a selection of the interviews that I collected during my fieldwork in Gaza. I choose to analyze these narratives as one set because they are all told by Palestinians from second and third generations of post-*nakba*. In my reading of these narratives, the question I wish to address is the following: for these later generations of Palestinians, what is it precisely that constitutes their experience and memory of catastrophe, since they were not yet born

when it happened? This question complements my earlier discussion of the multi-temporality of *al-nakba* and the Palestinian subject's heterochronic experience as an experience of catastrophic time. As I will attempt to show below, the Palestinian identity of later generations is not merely constructed through their parents' memories (post-memories) of the 1948 *nakba*, but rather shaped through their everyday experience of the loss of home in their exile in 2008.

Palestinian Identity Beyond the Post-Memory of Nakba

If Turki's story foregrounds the identity of his children as Palestinians in terms of familial (or trans-generational) memory, Yazid Sayigh's narrative elaborates on the construction of such an identity in the present. More than half a century after *al-nakba*, what is the spatio-temporal nature of the loss of home that determines the identity of second and third generations of post-*nakba* Palestinians? This is the question that Sayigh's narrative addresses. Here is how he opens his story:

> For an instant, before I have time to reflect, 1948 is encapsulated for me in two photographs I have in my study. One, in black and white, is an outside shot of my paternal grandparents posing with their seven children in Taberias in the early 1940s. The other, this time in color, was taken by my mother during a visit in 1980 and shows the front of the family house with its triple arched *liwan* and the black volcanic stone construction typical of the area. Neither photograph hints at the conflict that engulfed family and house; only my knowledge links them. Yet they reveal to me the way in which my images and imaginings – of life in Palestine in the Mandate years, of the individual stories of my father and his parents and siblings, and of the collective uprooting of 1947-49 – are telescoped into what has always seemed to me like a single event, depriving me of the detail and texture of a much richer fabric. (19)

Sayigh's storytelling presents us with a typical mode of what I call "post-memorial storytelling" in exile. This mode of storytelling can be seen in the way Sayigh describes his memory of *al-nakba* in terms of his family's two photographs. These two photographs are presented through a stark difference both temporally and spatially. Temporally, this difference is evident in Sayigh's storytelling of the "when" of the photographs. While the black and white family photograph is taken before *al-nakba* in the 1940s, the color one is taken after the event in 1980. Spatially, the difference between the photographs is determined thematically by what they show. In the black and white photograph, we see the grandparents with their children at home in Taberias, and in the color one we see the children who became parents themselves (Sayigh's mother), together with their children (Sayigh himself), in exile and "visiting" the lost home – as homeless tourists.

Moreover, Sayigh's description of the two photographs is noteworthy. While "neither photograph hints at the conflict that engulfed family and house", "only [his] knowledge links them". In this sentence, the word "knowledge" is key. It denotes the specific narrative position from which Sayigh speaks. The word "knowledge" concerns his post-memory: precisely, his knowledge does not equal his memory. Thus, Sayigh appears in the narrative as speaking from the position of post-memory, through which his storytelling becomes emphatically "post-memorial". This post-memorial storytelling manifests itself further in the way his "knowledge of his family's stories of loss of home" affects his personal relationship with the photographs. Through his knowledge of his family's stories, not only is Sayigh able to bridge the temporal gap between the two photographs, but he is also able to establish a spatial continuity between them in terms of their common theme, the loss of home. What supports this reading of his knowledge of the stories as a post-memory is Sayigh's description: "yet they reveal to me the way in which my images and imaginings are telescoped […]". Hence, through the temporal and spatial linkage between the two photographs, Sayigh establishes a continuity of the Palestinian experience of loss of homeland between the different generations – from his grandparents to his mother and to Sayigh himself.

At this juncture, and before proceeding with my reading of the rest of Sayigh's opening passage as well as the rest of his story, let me clarify my use of the term "post-memory" and what I mean by the intergenerational continuity of the Palestinian experience. This term, "post-memory", was introduced in discussions about the Holocaust. The Holocaust as a historical event is, however, fundamentally different from *al-nakba* as a historical event. Although both are catastrophic events, the Holocaust belongs to the past: it was over when the Second World War ended. *Al-nakba*, I argue, has an originating moment in the past, namely in 1948, but as a historical event it does not at all belong to the past; it extends into the present of Palestinian exile. In order to unpack this argument, I will problematize both "post-memory" and the intergenerational continuity of loss in terms of two theoretical insights as offered by Marianne Hirsch and Ernst van Alphen. The vigor of Hirsch's and Van Alphen's insights – both distinctively different as they are raised within the context of the Holocaust – is that their grounding of post-memory configures aspects of its cultural transmission in geopolitically conflicted discourses of memory, and they do so not merely in terms of historical and individual trauma but also in terms of post-memory as a "site-specific memorization"that affects subjective identification in the present.

In her article "Projected Memories: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy", Hirsch conceptualizes post-memory as a means to understand the complexities of

the memories of the children of Holocaust survivors as well as the processes of cultural transmission of memory itself. For Hirsch, the significance of post-memory as a specific form of memory distinguished from memory in general depends on generational distance and deep familial connections, and is ultimately grounded in its mediation "not through recollection, but rather through imaginative investment". Moreover, what underlies Hirsch's conceptualization is a particular model of post-memory, which she describes as follows: "as I can 'remember' my parents'memories, I can also 'remember' the suffering of others […]" At the heart of Hirsch's model of post-memory is "an *ethical* relationship" to suffering, and understandably so in terms of the Holocaust, in which the subjects (the children) "adopt traumatic experiences – and thus memories – of others as one's own" (1999: 8-9. Emphasis in original). Thus, for Hirsch, post-memory serves as a model in which a continuity of intergenerational transmission of traumatic memory and experiences becomes possible through imagination.[104]

This brings me to the second theoretical insight on post-memory, that of Van Alphen. In his article "Second-Generation Testimony, Transmission of Trauma, and Postmemory", Van Alphen questions the terms "post-memory", "survivor" and "second and third generations". According to Van Alphen, these terms "share with the idea of intergenerational transmission of trauma the claim of a fundamental continutity between generations". Van Alphen, however, rejects this idea of fundamental continutity between generations, and argues instead that, particularly in the case of the Holocaust, "the dynamics between children and survivor parents is rather defined by dis-connection, hence dis-continuity: disconnection not in an emotional, personal sense but in terms of intelligibility". Hence, what underlies Van Alphen's questioning of post-memory is the notion that the transmission of affect is not the same as the transmission of memory, and certainly not of the experience itself. In other words, for Van Alphen, "second and third generations"do not *really* have memories of the traumatic events, but rather the effect related to it in their parents'experience (2006: 488).

Taking into consideration my earlier argument of the multi-temporality of *al-nakba* and the subject's experience of this multi-temporality in exile, both Hirsch's model of the intergenerational continuity of memory and experience, and Van Alphen's distinction between memory and effect, trigger some personal reflection on my part as well as a closer look at Sayigh's post-memorial mode of storytelling with respect to the Palestinian situation. Insofar as my personal experience is relevant here, as an exiled Palestinian from the third generation of post-*nakba* Palestinians, I can only substantiate that my own knowledge of my family's

[104] For further explanation of Hirsch's conceptualization of post-memory, see also Hirsch (1997), especially chapter 1 and 6.

stories of *al-nakba* constitute my memory of *their* experience of the catastrophe im 1948. But these memories, working in Van Alphen's vein, are by no means constitutive my own memory and experience of catastrophe – my *nakba* happens in ongoing exile of Palestinians. For me, the closest model I can come up with to describe my post-memories of *al-nakba* would be as follows: as I can remember my grandmother's and mother's memories of 1948, I can also remember the suffering *not* of others, as Hirsch would have it, but rather my own, my loss of home in the everyday of exile in 2008.

Thus, the intergerational continuity of the Palestinian experience of loss of homeland does not constitute a given construct of Palestinian identity. Instead, as I indicated in my introduction to this study, what underlies this continuity in the Palestinian case is a present-oriented model of post-memory. In this model, not only the self, the child, takes the position of the other, the parent, but also the distinction between the memories of what the parents lived through in 1948 and what the children experience in 2008 may become so conflated and blurred that the intergenerational continuity of loss of place can in fact be sustained both in memory and everyday experience. This is so because the Palestinians' loss of home, through their exile, did not stop. Hence, in the case of Palestinians, the problem of the term "post-memory" is not so much with memory, but with "post". The "post" is by no means constitutive of the experience of catastrophe of subsequent generations of Palestinians; they do not have just post-memories of *al-nakba*. Whereas the first generations of post-*nakba* Palestinians have memories and experiences of the originating event of *al-nakba*, second and third generation of post-*nakba* Palestinians, although they have not experienced this originating moment (1948), are still "inside" the event itself living the catastrophe every day.

Similar dynamics take place in Sayigh's narrative. In the passage I have quoted, this can be seen in what his knowledge of his family's stories reveals to him in the two photographs. In his case, this knowledge reveals "images and imaginings" (19) that are composed of both individual and collective uprootings. These images and imaginings constantly lead him into what "always seemed [to him] like a single event". Sayigh's description clearly shows, to use Van Alphen's terminology, that what is transmitted to him through his parents' memories is both the "emotional" and the "personal" effect of their experience, but not the *real* experience of the event of *al-nakba* (2006: 473-88). This conceptualization manifests itself to the extent that the event (*al-nakba*) appears, for Sayigh, as a single event that "deprives" him of the "details" of his parents' experiences of the past event. For Sayigh, these details remain "un-intelligible". This is why he simply cannot narrate them. Unlike Nofal's and Turki's narratives, as well as the other narratives of the first

generation of post-*nakba* that I analyzed throughout this chapter and my study as a whole, nowhere in his story does Sayigh tell the details of the past *nakba* (1948). Instead, for Sayigh, the only way to expose the details of the past is by shifting the focus of his story from *al-nakba* (1948) to the ongoing catastrophe of exile – his own *nakba*.

This shift of focus to Sayigh's present experience in exile can be seen in his plea for the "need to deconstruct" the singularity of the event of *al-nakba*:

> For if there is one thing that I come away with from thinking about 1948, it is the need to deconstruct it and subject its distinct strands to separate analysis before reintegrating them in a dynamic narrative that is whole but multifaceted and multilayered and therefore both contractible and expandable […] 1948 is of course more than a series of historical events that took place in 1947-49 and that had specific, calculable material results. Were that the case, the Palestinian struggle would have been reducible to a legal and "technical political" dispute over repatriation and compensation, which it never was. Rather, it is precisely because for Palestinians 1948 is also about the content, form, and meaning of national identity as practiced in different symbolic and existential contexts – therefore involving variations, adaptations, and compromises – that we must cease to think of as a single event, from which we derive in unilinear fashion assumptions about who Palestinians are, how they came to be and how they will behave. (20-21)

According to Sayigh, then, the deconstruction of the singularity of *al-nakba* is indispensable to expose both its multi-temporality and the subject's experience of this multi-temporality in the present. Also, this deconstruction is vital to position *al-nakba* in a direct relation to the construction of Palestinian exilic identity. For Sayigh, just as we "must cease to think" of *nakba* as a singular event, Palestinian identity also needs to be understood as varied and multiple. Thus, the event must both be deconstructed and integrated into the fabric of Palestinian experience in the everyday.

This is what happens in the rest of Sayigh's story. He presents us, almost in the style of an academic essay, three analytical distinctions that the simultaneous deconstruction and integration of *al-nakba* in the everyday require. The first distinction is phrased in terms of what happened "before" and what came "after" *al-nakba*. As Sayigh puts it, to distinguish between the before and the after is to make a distinction "between the structural social, economic, political, and cultural discourse and practices of Palestinian society as they evolved in the late Ottoman and [British] Mandate periods, as they were transformed during the intense and sweeping dislocations of 1947-49, and as they adapted to post-Nakba realities" (20). The second distinction that Sayigh proposes is related to the multiplicity of the narrative of *al-nakba* "between the all-embracing nature of 1948 […] and the myriad responses to the unfolding of events of 1947-49 and equally myriad adaptations to their aftermath, which were

influenced in varying degrees and combinations by background markers […] as well as by external agency" (20).

His third and final analytical distinction is closely linked to these two, and concerns the construction of his own Palestinian identity in the present. For Sayigh's, the construction of identity takes place "between his personal and political responses to 1948", particularly in relation to the ways "[his] understanding of, and relation to, 1948 has shifted over time" (20). For him, then, the deconstruction and reintegration of *al-nakba* involves, first and foremost, the subject's understanding of the Palestinian experience of catastrophe as an ongoing event. The "continuity of *al-nakba*" is manifest in the ways in which the Palestinians' experience of loss of home (individual and collective) has unfolded since then (1948) in relation to both the imaginative and the discursive.

This imaginative-discursive conceptualization of the deconstruction and the reintegration of *al-nakba* into the everyday are brought out most concretely in the final two passages of Sayigh's story. Here is the first of these:

> I moreover strongly suspect that, although my own image of 1948 has been softened from the outset by middle-class upbringing and exposure to cosmopolitan lifestyles and universalistic liberal beliefs, Palestinians similarly born after 1948 who have had to contend with a much harsher aftermath in refugee camps or under Israeli occupation must nonetheless share with me at least a telescoped, compressed, and relativized perspective of 1948. Not that it is not hugely important to them, but simply that their emotional and perceptual stance cannot but be shaped both by their generational distance and by the immediacy of the socioeconomic settings and politico-administrative contexts in which they live. Reviewing the way in which 1948 has been narrated to date and how it has been related to subsequent institutional discourses and practices – by Palestinians – I am struck by the tyranny of the (male, class, and institution-dominated) nationalist narrative, and in particular by the narcissism of intellectuals […] simplifying and homogenizing their experiences and obscuring the fact that they, too, have varied and layered memories, feelings, and even readings of 1948. (22)

Here, Sayigh offers us a concrete conceptual framework for understanding the identity of later generations of Palestinians in terms of their post-memories of the past event (*al-nakba*) and their current experience in exile. This framework can be seen in Sayigh's self-reflexivity in which he acknowledges the multi-layered perceptions of *al-nakba*. Sayigh exposes the specificity of his personal "softened image" of *al-nakba* in terms of his own life circumstances. He also articulates the inevitable alterity of this "image" for other Palestinians who, like him, were born after the event, yet who live in different circumstances and "had to contend with a much harsher aftermath in refugee camps or under Israeli occupation […]"

The most significant sentence in Sayigh's description with regards to post-memory is this:"Palestinians similarly born after 1948 […] must nonetheless share with me at least a telescoped, compressed, and relativized perspective of 1948". Here, Sayigh's description holds the key to the imaginative-discursive framework through which the identity of post-*nakba* generations of Palestinians can be assessed in relation to their post-memories of *nakba* and their experiences of its action in the everyday of exile. Thus, for Sayigh, the "telescoped perspective" of the catastrophe of 1948 of post-*nakba* Palestinians needs to be correlated with their current everyday lives. What supports this reading of Sayigh's description is the following sentence, where he utterly condemns the grand narrative of Palestinian identity: "Not that [*nakba*] is not hugely important to them, but simply that their emotional and perceptual stance cannot but be shaped both by their generational distance and by the immediacy of the socioeconomic settings and politico-administrative contexts in which they live". Sayigh's condemnation is based not only on the socio-cultural "male, class, and institution-dominated tyranny" that governs the narration of the Palestinian national narrative, but also the ways in which this narrative has been intellectualized. For him, the intellectual practices concerned with the narrative of Palestinian cultural identity have often "simplified" and "homogenized" this narrative by failing to take into consideration its multifaceted articulations in the everyday lives of Palestinians: "I am struck by the tyranny […] and in particular the narcissism of intellectuals […]"

In the final passage, following the imaginative-discursive framework he has proposed, Sayigh reflects on what *al-nakba* means for him personally in the present:

> When I return in my mind to the family house in Tiberias, I wonder what life might have been like had I […] been born there, but conclude that I might in all probabilities have been displaced and diverted by other, unforeseen if more peaceable migrations […] That I was unjustly and forcibly deprived of this birthright is undeniable, but at personal level I like to derive black humor from the fact that the family house has since been turned into what is reputedly the best Chinese restaurant in Tiberias. (22)

Sayigh's imaginative investment of *al-nakba* is closely linked to his experience in the present. This can be seen in the way Sayigh's imagination of loss of home, "when I return in my mind […]", leads him back into a concrete experience of loss, namely the denial of his birthright in Palestine: "That I was unjustly and forcibly deprived of this birthright is undeniable […]". Sayigh's "black humor" concerning the fact that the lost family house became a "Chinese restaurant […]" signifies that his absence from home is not a peaceful migration. Sayigh's articulation of his post-memory of *al-nakba*, shifting the focus of his storytelling from his

parents' *nakba* of 1948 to his own experience of this catastrophe in the present, becomes an "ongoing memory" that frames and disperses a symbolic landscape of loss of place. By "ongoing memory", I mean a memory that harks back to a traumatic originary event (*al-nakba*) and, at the same time, is constantly reworked, reactivated by new events and rearticulated in new acts of memory. This ongoing memory exposes an imaginative geography and history that helps the exiled subject intensify his or her sense of self as a Palestinian both individually and collectively in the everyday.

Similar conceptions of the post-memory of the past event of *nakba*, and the ways its dynamics bear on the identity of post-*nakba* Palestinians, are worked into the stories which I have collected in Gaza. Here is, for example, the story of Yousef, a taxi driver living in Jabalia Refugee Camp, who left his hometown with his family during *al-nakba*. This is how he describes what the catastrophe means to him today:

> Of course, I remember the story of my family and how they were driven out by Jewish war planes from Jora to Gaza in 1948. My father, while pulling the camel on which my mother sat with my newborn sister (Layla), was carrying me on his shoulders then. We live in the camp, and my children were born there too – their grandmother and I told them the story already. We still have ownership papers of our house in Jora – my kids know everything; not only where they live, but also where they come from and what they missed […] We would return tomorrow, if they let us. Who would want to live in this small place? Our home and land in Jora were much bigger […]
> (Yousef, Jabalia Refugee Camp. April 3, 2004)

Yousef not only remembers his parents' stories, but also interiorizes these post-memories as his own. Narratologically, this interiorzation of post-memory is most obvious in Yousef's use of pronouns ("I" and "we"). While in the first sentence of his story, Yousef narrates his post-memory as "I remember the story of my family […]"; in the rest of the passage he inserts himself into the story. This can be seen when he says: "We live in the camp […] We still have ownership papers of our house in *Jora* [...]" While the "ownership papers" of the lost house belong to his parents, Yousef's use of the pronoun "we" in the narrative transfers this loss to him and to his children. Thus, instead of a narrator of the story of loss of home, Yousef and his children become characters *in* this story. As in Sayigh's story, in Yousef's story the absence of the details of his parents' experience of *al-nakba* is compensated through a shift to his own and his children's experiences in the refugee camp today.

This temporal shift from post-memory to the present experience of exile is also echoed in the narrative of Samah, a university student from Rafah Refugee Camp:

> *Al-nakba* is a defeat for me. I know the past, because my present is one of military occupation and exile. I am a twenty-eight years old refugee from Demra, but I never saw it. I know about my home from parents and grandparents. This camp is not my place; it is the place of refugeeism, not my country. Demra is my land. In the camp, I was born imprisoned. I am imprisoned. Of course I want to return there – I don't want to remain a refugee.
>
> (Samah, Rafah Refugee Camp. April 10, 2004)

For Samah, *al-nakba* is a personal "defeat". Her storytelling affirms her knowledge of the past in a causal relationship with her life in exile. The past loss of home manifests itself in and through Samah's experience as a Palestinian "refugee". According to Samah, "[She] know[s] the past, because [her] present is one of military occupation and exile". For Samah, the experience of *al-nakba* is grounded in her ongoing experience of "imprisonment" in exile.

Finally, the most poignant depiction of the continuity of *nakba* in the everyday of Palestinian exile is offered by the story of Abdelaziz, from Al-Shati Refugee Camp:

> For me, *al-nakba* means many things. It is the story of my grandfather, father and mother when they lost our home in Nijd in 1948 […] Since I opened my eyes on this world, I grew up seeing a strange occupying army with an Israeli flag that I don't identify with or whatsoever. The soldiers imprisoned me because I threw stones during the 1987 Intifada [the uprising] when I was 17 years old. They stopped me from going to school; they ruined my future life since I was young. Now, I am grown up, married with kids, unemployed and can hardly feed my family, but thanks to God; without knowing how my kids are still alive [growing up].
>
> (Abdelaziz, Al-Shati Refugee Camp. April 10, 2004)

Abdelaziz conceives of *al-nakba*, like the other storytellers, as his parents' stories of the times when they lost their homes in 1948: "it is the story of my father, mother […]" Abdelaziz's post-memorial storytelling of *al-nakba* exposes the everyday of Palestinian exile in contemporary terms. He describes *al-nakba* as a condition of "slow death" that has controlled his life from the moment of birth. For him, this condition of slow death manifests itself in the events of his life: "being born under occupation, imprisoned and barred from going to school, unemployed and can hardly feed his family". These cruel conditions are precisely what constitute Abdelaziz's experience of *al-nakba.* They are presented as imposed colonial mechanisms that not only affirm the Palestinian subject's post-memory of the past *nakba* of 1948, but continue to determine his or her ongoing memory and experience of the catastrophe in present exile. Hence, we can now say, his identity as *mankoub*. As Abdelaziz explicitly puts it: "To make a long story short, me and everyone I know are dying slowly as refugees. Slow death is all that Israel did, and still does, to us daily – that is my *al-nakba*" (2004).

Abdelaziz's everyday *nakba* brings me to my concluding remarks. I have argued for a reading of the oral accounts of *al-nakba* as narratives. This is possible through reading them as both memorial and post-memorial modes of storytelling. At the heart of reading these modes is a close attention to the stories' language, rhetoric, and concepts rather than to their history and ethnography. Instead of analyzing *al-nakba*'s brute exercises in the past, I have read the verbal signs of this catastrophe in the current everyday of the *mankoub*. This textual, narrative, and anachronistic reading is helpful to expose not only the multi-temporality of *al-nakba*, but also the Palestinian subject's experience of this multi-temporality in the present – an everyday experience that I have called an experience of catastrophic time.

As I argued, exposing the Palestinians' everyday experience of catastrophe is crucial. It helps us to conceive of the construction of Palestinian identity in the present not only as a multifaceted concept, but also as one that is difficult to elucidate merely in terms of 1948. Many of the stories I have analyzed in this chapter, and throughout this study, suggest that the process of identity formation of Palestinians is not only determined historically by their loss of home during *al-nakba* (1948), but also and crucially by the "open-endedness" of their catastrophic experience of this loss in 2008. This is how reading narratives and memories of *al-nakba* becomes a practice of knowing how to read the imagining (or imaging) of the past, yet without detaching it from the subject's everyday of exile.