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NATION, PLACE AND PLACELESSNESS: IDENTITY, BODY, AND GEOGRAPHY IN THE CASE OF PALESTINE

Feminist theory has drawn attention to the centrality of gender in the formation of national identities. However, the Palestinian crisis cannot be understood solely through the gendered lens of national identities or national narratives; rather, the problem is geographical: is there any place for the Palestinian *to be?* The phenomenon of Palestinian "disappearance" in any form other that the specter of the terrorist is thus not simply a discursive effect that might be addressed through more positive or complicated representations of Palestinian presence; disappearance is also the corporeal effect of placelessness, whereby the body with no place is pressured to disappear.

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Gender and nation, body and place

Prior to the 1948 war which resulted in both Israeli state and Palestinian catastrophe, the emergent expressions of a common Palestinian identity and destiny were exploratory and prospective, imagining and constructing alternative ways of affiliation and political formation (Muslih 1988; Welty 1995). While one might term this the first wave of nationalism, this is somewhat misleading in so far as the "nation" was a relatively new idea, of European origin, and it is perhaps only retrospectively that appeals in the early part of the century to "palestinianness" can be termed "nationalistic." In contrast, the second wave of Palestinian nationalism fomented in the 1960s in refugee camps and among university students, and institutio- nalized in 1964 by the formation of the PLO, was more explicitly aligned with the rhetoric and forms of anti-colonial struggle, positing the desire for repatriation and self-determination in the dominant terms of nationalism and national liberation. In the context of twentieth century decolonization

struggles, assertions of historical agency have typically taken the form of the claim (and construction) of national identity (Chatterjee 1986).

As Nira Yuval-Davis has shown, the claim of national identity typically emerges in a gendered form, positing an alignment between nationalism and masculinism (Yuval-Davis 1997). In Palestine as elsewhere, nationalist discourse invents a national body, and this body is specifically masculine. Joseph Massad has undertaken an analysis of founding Palestinian national texts, and has concluded: "In the intro- duction to the Palestinian Nationalist Charter, the Zionist conquest of Palestine is presented as a rape of the land. It views Palestinians as the children of Palestine, portrayed as a mother. The Zionist enemy is clearly seen as masculine, and the wrong committed by this enemy against Palestinians is considered metaphorically to be of a violent sexual nature." (Massad 1995:470-471). Against this conquest as masculine sexual violence, the Palestinian must become potent, must claim and evince a masculine agency powerful enough free the women/mother/land from the usurpers grasp.

The invention of a Palestinian national subject as the agent of liberation, an essentially masculine subject, is the counterpart to the invention of the heroic masculine Israeli national subject, the "sabra." Israeli national identity, as Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and others have argued, emerges as an explicit rejection and repudiation of Diasporic Jewish identity. For example, Beit Hallahmi cites Jabotinsky, an early Zionist leader, who makes explicit both the invention of a new identity and the explicit gendering of that identity: "Because the Jid is ugly, sickly, and lacks decorum, we shall endow the ideal image of the Hebrew with masculine beauty, tall stature, mighty shoulders, vigorous movement, radiance of colors and complexion. The Jid is trodden upon and easily frightened and, therefore, the Hebrew ought to be proud and independent. ... The Jid had accepted submission and, therefore, the Hebrew ought to learn how to command" (Beit-Hallahmi 1992:125; see also Gover 1986). As Joseph Massad points out, the renaming of the new post-Diasporic Israeli subject as "sabra" (the Arabic name for a cactus prickly pear) make the new Jew into an organic outgrowth of the relation tot he land: "The New Jew is not only a hard fruit to pick, he also grows in the desert, the product of a new geography. His mother is nature and the 'Land of Israel.' His name is part and parcel of the geographic, historical and cultural appropriation of Palestine by Zionism" (Massad 2000:337). The national struggle is thus also figuratively masculinized, as the Israeli "sabra" is met with the Palestinian "freedom fighter," each embodying national identity as potent masculinity.

In this gendered narrative, women's role is aligned with reproduction. For example, Massad shows how the language of national struggle used in the communiques issued by the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising and the PLO figures Palestinian women primarily in their reproductive capacity (female "fertility" thus taking the

place of the lost mother/soil) (Massad 1995). Similarly, Nira Yuval-Davis suggests that Jewish Israeli women have been constructed as "national reproducers" in Israel: "the main emphasis of Jewish motherhood in Israel had more to do with its qualitative aspect – of producing the 'New Jew', 'the Sabre', the antithesis of the 'Diaspora Jew' whose negative image the zionist movement shared with European anti-semitism..." (Yuval-Davis 1989:101). And in the context of perpetual anxiety regarding the demographic balance in Israel, reproduction becomes not only a symbolic, but also a practical battleground. "Since the 1970s the number of children has become also a conscious political weapon among Palestinian nationalists. ... slogans like 'The Israelis beat us at the borders but we beat them at the bedrooms' started to be heard, and poems, a traditional mobilising means in Arab societies, were written in this spirit" (Yuval-Davis 1989:96).

Without disputing the social force such narratives effect to normalize and privilege particular positions and practices, it should be noted that the "bodies" posited by these competing national and nationalistic narratives are wholly ideal. As gender ideals, the national mother or the heroic fighter may function socially as potent normalizing standards of identification and behavior. Yet such ideal bodies can not really exist. In that sense, one might view them as produced by the exigencies of a national narrative that constitutes a national body as its subject. That is, the nation is not the externalized expression of the natural/national body; rather the fiction of the nation requires that a national body be posited as its subject, the putative origin after the fact of a narrative of nation formation. For feminist critics of nationalism, understanding the con-structedness and exclusivity of the "national body" helps account for the implicit masculinity of the "citizen" and the persistent subordination of women within nationalist discourse. If the masculine national subject is the heroic counterpart to the feminine mother-land, then perhaps the contest between Israeli nationalism and Palestinian nationalism can only repeat and reinforce the pairing of nationalist agency and masculinity. Palestinian feminists, like other women engaged in anti-colonial movements, have sought to challenge the masculinist presumptions of nationalism while retaining a commitment to the nation.

The gendered body emerges in national narrative as the (always already) gendered subject of narrative. But if we shift our attention from struggles over national narratives and representations to struggles over space, place and movement, it is not immediately evident that the bodies in question will always be gendered in the same way. In particular, the body whose claim to place is uncontested is a different sort of body than the body denied any place and forced into the perpetual motion of placelessness. The body in place expands, where the placeless body contracts. The body in place moves from place to place, where the placeless body is and goes nowhere. The relation of gender to these divergent modalities of emplacement and movement is not immediately apparent, suggesting that to say that bodies are corporealized is not

necessarily to say that they are gendered. Feminist theory has drawn attention to corporeality in order to insist that gender matters; yet it seems to me that to insist that the body is necessarily gendered is to substitute gender for corporeality in a way that assumes in advance the very thing one must investigate, that is, the formation or production of the body. The question then is whether one might consider the distance between Israeli and Palestinian not in terms of national identities and national narratives, but in terms of divergent relations to place and movement, and subsequently divergent modalities of corporeality. Palestinian "dis-appearance" is thus not simply a discursive effect that might be addressed through representations of Palestinian presence; disappearance is also the corporeal effect of placelessness, whereby the body with no place is pressured to disappear.

Fanon's Manichean geography

In its early years, the most powerful image of the 1987-1993 Palestinian uprising or *intifada* was of a young child hurling a small stone. Stones and courage were the only weapons used to fight back against a powerful, armed occupying force. Where did all those stones of resistance come from? The barren landscape of most of the West Bank, and Gaza even more so, certainly provided ample ammunition. But stone is not only the most ample source of ammunition; it is also the preferred building material. Palestinians built their house of stones; as their primary asset as well as their shelter, the demolition of these houses as a means of collective punishment in the Occupied Territories inflicted enormous damage and suffering:

> Palestinians in the occupied territories pour more than 80 percent of their disposable income into the building of private homes, in which, due to cultural tradition and economic circumstance, they live with their extended families. The solid stone houses which they favor are painstakingly built by hand over a number of years. Each demolition then not only makes an average of 10 people homeless, but constitutes a bitter emotional blow, the destruction of years of hard labor and the loss of a family's entire life savings ("Demolishing" 1989:8).

When the Israeli military demolished these stone houses in reprisal for acts of resistance, for "stones thrown", the economy of the stone comes full circle. The stone is the material link between political struggle for self--determination and the intimate security of the home. In one case, 14 houses were razed in retaliation of the alleged death of a settler by stoning (although an army investigation determined that the settler had actually been killed by another settler). "An Israeli army officer justified the demolitions by saying that 'stones had been thrown' from the area" ("Demolishing" 1989:9). The stones appeared to have been hurled by the houses themselves. It is as though the houses themselves are the agents of resistance, destroying themselves in order to defend themselves in an

frenzy of auto-dismemberment. The stone marks construction and destruction, home and homelessness, oppression and resistance.

The play between stone and house, between raw material and building, between natural barren land and peopled settlement, has always been the terrain over which discursive and material struggles over Israeli occupation, settlement, and sovereignty have taken place. Edward Said provocatively suggests that Zionism, as a variant of European imperialism, "saw Palestine as the European imperialist did, as an empty territory paradoxically 'filled' with ignoble or perhaps even dispensable natives" (Said 1992:81). If the territory is functionally "empty", it can only be because its inhabitants do not exist, their bodily presence not withstanding. Stone houses turned back to stones under the blade of the bulldozer simply repeats the prior representational gesture of discursively de--peopling the populated landscape. Thus it is appropriate and not at all coincidental that the favored mode of collective punishment toward those who would resist their slow but inexorable dispossession should be the destruction of their homes tout court. While house demolition is understood as collective punishment, making the family suffer for the individual's (often only alleged) actions, it appears that the houses themselves are the target of Israeli wrath, the locus of offense and defense. The conflict between Palestinian and Israeli is revealed in its most intimate dimensions in these house demolitions to be a conflict of domestic geography, a conflict of place and of home. The real war in the occupied territories is a home war of attrition; house demolitions and sealings are only the most visible component of a home policy – homes destroyed, sealed, or appropriated on the one side, and on the other, a virtual prohibition on any Palestinian construction or repair through bureaucratic control of the building permit process. On the other side, the settlements continue. Slowly the landscape is transformed, irregardless of peace talks, agreements, political postures. The Palestinian crisis has been one of homelessness at the level of a people; the day to day operations of occupation in West Bank and Gaza slowly effect what the idea of Israel has always assumed. Those who remain in the violent contact zones of West Bank and Gaza live in a constant confrontation with the colonial project of displacement, the emptying of out this land so that its material geography corresponds with its imaginary geography.

What Said has described as the discursive non-existence of the Palestinians is a counterpart to an ongoing material project of displacement. Thus, I propose to supplement Said's notion of discursive non-existence with the question of material non-existence; for while the discursive non-existence of the Palestinians might be addressed through a politics of representation, representation alone does not address the material facts of body and place. What is the material dimension of Palestinian placelessness? How does discursive non-existence reconcile with the material persistence of bodies, even as those bodies are syste-matically pushed to the limits of existence? On the one hand, an Aristo-

telian positivism provides for a simple correlation between a given body and a given place, and assures that every body, because extended in space, must also take up a place. Yet what counts as body, and what appears as place, may not be so easily determined, and furthermore, both body and place may emerge out of complex material and discursive relations, rather than simply pre-existing as raw matter outside the social production of meaning.

Franz Fanon's "Manichean geography" of the settler town and the native town provides a framework for thinking about the mutual emergence of body and place within a geography shaped by the dynamic of settler colonialism (Fanon 1963:38-54). While Israel's history differs in significant ways from that of other similarly settled nations such as the United States or South Africa, Fanon's analysis nevertheless provides a useful starting point that foregrounds the relation between the formation of territory and the formation of the body. In Fanon's juxtaposed descriptions of the settler town and the native town, there are no "natural" bodies, nor are their natural spaces. Rather, both body and geography are produced out of the workings of colonial power.

In the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon draws attention to the geography of colonization:

> The native is a being hemmed in; apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments of the colonial world. The first thing which the native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits (Fanon 1963:52).

For Fanon, this is both a physical restriction on the space and provision allotted the native, and an ideological "hemming in" which denies full humanity and subjectivity to the native. The destruction of this "Manichean world" is thus simultaneously an overthrow of colonial geography in order to reclaim of the territory, and an overthrow of colonial ideology in order to reclaim humanity and historicity. Recent readers of Fanon, interested in questions of subjectivity, desire, representation and identity, have emphasized the racializing effect of colonialism and its world of Manichean oppositions. From this perspective, the geographical specificity of what Fanon describes as a "world divided into compartments" is primarily a metaphor for the racializing division between white and black. Yet Fanon begins from the non-metaphoric practices of colonialism: "The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations" (Fanon 1963:38). The violence and arbitrariness or racial division are suggested by the emphasis on military and police as agents of division; but equally, Fanon suggests that the condition of such division is inextricably material.

As Fanon's description of the contrast between the settler town and the native town suggests, all bodies are not equal. It is not only that the colonial encounter engenders the opposing identities of settler and native;

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it is equally that the quotidian practices of spatial management work to produce the bodies of settler and native as white and black, clean and dirty, full and hungry, expanded and contracted. Fanon's descriptions move seamlessly between the material condition of the town and the disposition of the bodies that live there.

> The settlers' town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. The settler's feet are never visible, except perhaps in the sea; but there you're never close enough to see them. His feet are protected by strong shoes although the streets of his town are clean and even, with no holes or stones. The settler's town is a well-fed town, an easygoing town; its belly is always full of good things. The settlers' town is a town of white people, of foreigners (Fanon 1963:39).

Both settler body and settler building are armored, invulnerable – neither the settler's feet nor the interior of the settler's homes are sullied by dirt or exposed to the outside. Through the synecdoche of the "well-fed town," the settler's body merges into the architecture and geography of the town: when the settler's belly is full, the town's belly is full as well. The white body that inhabits this town is a body made by and in the town, a body particular to its geographical circumstances.

In contrast, the native town:

> is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs (Fanon 1963:39).

Both huts and bodies are deprived of space. And deprived of space, the body is likewise deprived of sustenance: starved, naked, cold, dirty. While the settler's body is expanding, belly distended, the native's body gets smaller. Crouching, on its knees, the body fills less space; without shoes, the extension of the body is diminished; without bread or meat, the flesh shrinks and weakens.

In this Manichean geography, there are no "natural" bodies. Both the "white people" and the "niggers" are constituted through simultaneously material and discursive emplacements. Nevertheless, while the matter of the body is subject to multiple and indeterminate materializations, it is necessarily the case that body – in its minimal determination – is material, and therefore emplaced. Rather than thinking of human bodies that are variously impinged and expanded by their material circumstances, I am suggesting we consider the body of the settler or the body of the native as a contingent and emergent modality of corporeality. From this perspective, body is not simply the physical instrument of struggle or domination; it is rather the stake. Body, because material, takes place: what place will be

accorded to the body? As Fanon suggests, it is a battle not simply of social position, but of physical place.

> [The native] dreams of possession – all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, "They want to take our place." It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place (Fanon 1963:39).

The struggle between native and settler is here exposed as a struggle between men, and in particular a sexual struggle for possession of the female body. Yet I would suggest that this narrative of gendered bodies does not tell the whole tale. In particular, there is a slippage between the raw corporeality of the bodies described in relation to the towns, and this re-socialized body, the native masculine body that desires table, bed, or wife, that desires the position of propertied patriarch.

But while Fanon only goes so far as to imagine a colonizer who seeks to dominate and exploit a contained and controlled native population, the figures of containment can be extended to the circumstance in which the aim is not to control or dominate the native, but to make the native disappear. While the French settlers in Fanon's Algeria sought to incorporate and rule the native population, in Israel's variant of the settler colonialism (like that of the U.S.) the native population appears only as an obstacle to the realization of a new and ideally, if only imaginarily, homogeneous nation. Thus, it is less a matter of a world divided up in to compartments, as Fanon suggests. Rather, it is that one compartment, the settler's, becomes all, and the other must be made to disappear. Containment of the native in this case is not static, but progressively reduced and tightened. Less and less space is allotted the native, squeezing the native into a smaller and smaller reserve. The representation of an empty land is made factual by the emptying out the land through expulsion, destruction, or constriction of the bodies that were already there. It is thus bodies, the bodies on the ground, their survival and their material and geographical disposition, that are at stake in the politics of representation through which histories, narratives, and territories are described, enacted, disputed, and transformed.

Identity and placelessness

Liisa Malkki suggests that "the naturalization of the links between people and place leads to a vision of displacement as pathological, and this, too, is conceived in botanical terms, as uprootedness. Uprootedness comes to signal a loss of moral and, later, emotional bearings. Since both cultural and national identities are conceived in territorialized terms, uprootedness also threatens to denature and spoil these" (Malkki 1992:34). These

assumptions underlie the perception of the Palestinian loss in 1948 as not only a loss of individual properties and life prospects, but a catastrophic national loss, consigning the Palestinians to the pathological status of exile or refugeehood. And similarly, such assumptions underpin the interpretation of Jewish Diaspora as a territorial loss that must be regained (Boyarin & Boyarin 1993). Malkki critiques these assumptions by pointing to two versions of what she calls (following Deleuze and Guattari) "deterritorialized identity" among Hutu refugees. Those living in refugee camp "valued and protected [their refugee status] as a sign of the ultimate temporariness of exile" while those living in the town developed a "lively cosmopolitanism" that "dismantled the national metaphysics by refusing a mapping and spurning origin queries altogether" (Malkki 1992:40). The latter in particular expose the limitations of the naturalized relation between identity and rootedness. The deterritorialized identities that emerge from the cosmopolitan refusal of a home-place, or the exilic deferral of a home-place, pose a radical challenge to the "national order of things" that aligns territory, culture, people and nation.

Following Malkki's analysis of the deterritorialized refugee, one might look to Palestinian displacement as another possible locus of challenge to the "national order of things," an alternative historical possibility for cosmopolitan refusal or exilic deferral of rootedness. However, the placelessness I am interested in is less cosmopolitan than corporeal, less an ethical condition for inhabiting the world by forming multiple and contingent attachments to place than an uninhabitable condition of having no place at all. The gap between the cosmopolitan's positive identification with placelessness and a placelessness that works to foreclose identifications is suggested by Rashid Khalidi's account in *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* of Palestinian encounters with state borders. It is significant that these stories, rather than a sociological or historical account of ethnicity, constitute the frame and rhetorical point of entry for his study, for it suggests a way of thinking about Palestinian identity quite different from the "national consciousness" that is the object of the remainder of the study. Khalidi describes the way in which Palestinians are subject to embarrassment, harassment, anxiety, exclusion in their encounters with barriers that others take for granted. It is this experience, rather than some essence, that makes them Palestinian: "The fact that all Palestinians are subject to these special indignities, and thus are all subject to an almost unique postmodern condition of shared anxiety at the frontier, the checkpoint and the crossing point proves that they are a people, if nothing else does" (Khalidi 1997:5). Thus, Khalidi suggests that it is neither rootedness in place nor the memory of a lost place that constitutes contemporary Palestinian identity, but rather a specific modality of motion (and therefore embodiment) in relation to geographical crossing points.

For Khalidi, "the quintessential Palestinian experience...takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short, at any of those many modern

barriers where identities are checked and verified" (Khalidi 1997:1). The verification of identity here is the most superficial: to discern identity at the level of the signifier, the title that adheres to the body marked "Palestinian" (or in the case of those bearing Israeli-issued documents, "undetermined"). If "American" and "French" may cross borders without experiencing an existential crisis, it is because it is not identity-in-general that is put in question, but only which one. If in contrast the border--crossing is the "quintessential Palestinian experience" it is because it is the moment of verification not only of a particular identity, one among several, but of identity at all: it must be verified that one has an identity – – and this is precisely what "Palestinianness" has thrown into question. That is to say, it is the experience of identity as a problem that forms the basis for Palestinian identity; the very impossibility of identity itself becomes an identity. If, as Khalidi baldly puts it, "borders are a problem for Palestinians," it is because it is the function of such borders to put identity on trial; and it is at the non-place of the border, as the neither-here-nor--there between geographically defined state entities, that the non-place (the non-existence) of the Palestinian comes most starkly into relief.

The existential dilemma of such an identity-as-negation is materialized in the anecdotes Khalidi relates as evidence for reasons that Palestinians might dread encounters at the border:

> [A] Palestinian...was shuttled back and forth on airliners between an Arab Gulf state and Lebanon for three weeks in 1991 because his identity documents were not satisfactory to the authorities at either end of his trajectory. In September 1991, Gaza Strip Palestinians carrying Egyptian travel papers who were expelled from Kuwait spent twelve days sleeping in Cairo Airport because they did not have the proper documents to enter Egypt or the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip, to go back to Kuwait, or to go anywhere else. Similarly, in July 1993, numerous Palestinians expelled by Libya were stranded for weeks on the Libyan--Egyptian border. Entire refugee camps sprang up in the same no-man's--land the following year, after the Libyan authorities expelled thousands more Palestinians, whose travel papers were not acceptable to any country (Khalidi 1997:2).

The Palestinians of these stories are constantly vulnerable to the essential equivocation of their "identity documents" and "travel papers". The risk of failure of these papers, and the fragility of the "identity" they indicate, is less simple immobility than the itinerant forced mobility of the airline passenger going no-where, continually retracing the same mid-air trajectory because there was no "earthly" place prepared to recognize him or allow his claim of entry. Airplanes, airports, refugee camps in the interzone between border check points; these are the topographical "no--places" that correspond to Palestinian (non)identity.

Reading Khalidi's anecdotes of Palestinian identity as narratives registering the material condition of Palestinian being, what emerges is a repeated figuring of the Palestinian problem (for the Palestinians) as a

material crisis of placelessness. Thus, while the political rhetoric of the Palestinian struggle has focused on territorial claims within a nationalist framework, one might locate a parallel poetics of Palestinian being that translates or doubles the nationalist rhetoric of territorial sovereignty into another, more phenomenological register: that of embodied location, the body in or out of place. As violence continues to shape the seemingly intractable counter between Israel and Palestine, the question persists: is there any place to be Palestine? To be Palestinian? Is there anyplace for the Palestinian to be?

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NAROD, MJESTO I NJEGOV GUBITAK:
IDENTITET, TIJELO I ZEMLJOPIS U PALESTINSKOM SLUČAJU

SAŽETAK

Feministička je teorija upozorila na središnju važnost roda u oblikovanju nacionalnih identiteta. Međutim, palestinska kriza ne može se razumijevati samo iz rodne perspektive kada su u pitanju nacionalni identiteti i nacionalne naracije. Problem je zemljopisne naravi: ima li za Palestinca mjesta na kojem može *biti*? Fenomen palestinskog "nestanka" iz bilo koje druge forme osim utvare terorista tako nije samo diskurzivni učinak kojemu bi se moglo pristupiti pozitivnijim ili složenijim prikazbama palestinske nazočnosti; nestanak je isto toliko tjelesni učinak gubitka mjesta, pri kojem se tijelo kojemu nema mjesta prisiljava na nestanak.

Ključne riječi: palestinska kriza, antropologija tijela, simbolički zemljopis